

**Lost in a Town of Pigs: The Story of Aesop's Fables**

**by**

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## INTRODUCTION

### *Wolf*

A wolf is reading a book of fairy tales.  
The moon hangs over the forest, a lamp.  
He is not assuming a human position,  
say, cross-legged against a tree,  
as he would in a cartoon.

This is a real wolf, standing on all fours,  
his rich fur bristling in the night air,  
his head bent over the book open on the ground.  
He does not sit down for the words  
would be too far away to be legible,  
and it is with difficulty that he turns  
each page with his nose and forepaws.

When he finishes the last tale  
he lies down in pine needles.  
He thinks about what he has read,  
the stories passing over his mind,  
like the clouds crossing the moon.  
A zigzag of wind shakes down hazelnuts.  
The eyes of owls yellow in the branches.

The wolf now paces restlessly in circles  
around the book until he is absorbed  
by the power of its narration,  
making him one of its illustrations,  
a small paper wolf, flat as print.  
Later that night, lost in a town of pigs,  
he knocks over houses with his breath.

-- Billy Collins (in *Questions about Angels*)

The wolf is surprised to find this book in the woods; even more surprising is that  
this is a book *about him*, as he realizes later in his dreams when he becomes the wolf in

that book, lost in a town of pigs, knocking over houses with his breath. It is not easy for the wolf to read that book. He cannot read it as a human does, sitting down, cross-legged, but he manages to pace his way around the book, turning the pages with his nose and paws, using the light of the moon to see what is there.

The problem that we face today in reading Aesop's fables is similar to the wolf's problem. It is not that the fables belong to an animal world and that we are humans (indeed, the animals in Aesop's fables are not very "natural" at all, and are often extravagantly anthropomorphic). The problem is instead that Aesop's fables were not originally a literary genre. In the same way that the wolf is baffled by the object that is a book, I would argue that the classicists who have studied Aesop's fables are baffled by the fact that Aesop's fables are not a book, that Aesop is not and never was a writer. Yet, like the wolf in the poem who finds that this strange object, the "book," is talking about him, Aesop's fables are also talking about us, and it is this connection that makes it possible to overcome the cultural and technological impediments that stand between modern literary scholars and this ancient oral art form. The Aesopic fable is a genre that always spoke to its audience, and its voice still reaches us, even across the tenuous bridge of the written word.

The wolf has trouble turning the pages of the book; our troubles stem from the fact that there is no book, no pages to turn. We expect to have a book of Aesopic fables to study, but once Aesopic fables are put into books they are not fables in the same way any longer. The written collections of Aesopic fables are exactly that -- written collections -- yet we know that the Aesopic fable was not originally a way of writing but

a way of speaking. Some of the fables written down in antiquity also record this oral context, showing a story-teller (sometimes, but not always, Aesop) addressing his fable to an audience. In most cases, however, the written fables are stripped of this performative context, and are compiled in a book, one after another, arranged in an endless, silent series.

These written collections present the modern scholar with a very paradoxical problem: these written records are -- and are not -- Aesopic fables. In studying these fables, it is thus necessary to work both with and against the written record, which is what I have attempted to do in this dissertation. In the first two chapters, I work with the written form of the fables, using the evidence to construct a definition of the characteristic plot of an Aesopic fable (Chapter 1) and the distinctive way in which the Aesopic fable expresses the "moral" of the story (Chapter 2). Then, in the remaining chapters, I try to show how the literary record actually alters the genre because of the peculiarities of the writing situation itself: the very nature of the fables is changed by the impositions of the author's literary ambitions, the new role assigned to the audience as the reader of a book, and so on. Different versions of the same fable as told by different authors appear from chapter to chapter in this dissertation; interested readers can use the index of fables to see how the same fable might be approached from a variety of different angles. Like the wolf pacing restlessly around the book of fairy tales, we cannot reach the Aesopic fables by way of a straight path.

There is an on-going version of this dissertation with additional indexes and materials which can be consulted on-line at the author's website at the Classics

Department of the University of Oklahoma ([www.ou.edu](http://www.ou.edu)). To facilitate the presentation of these materials on-line, a transliteration system has been adopted for the Greek texts which does not record the accentual markings of the Greek: ê indicates simply the Greek letter eta, and ô indicates simply the letter omega.

\* \* \*

There are many people who have talked with me about Aesop and the fables over the past several years; I am grateful to each and every one of them for their insight and encouragement. Special thanks are due to all the wonderful people in Naomi Teplow's poetry club, to Maurizio Bettini and all the great students from his Berkeley seminars, to the very magical Henk Versnel, and to the members of my dissertation committee: David Frick, Ralph Hexter, and Kathy McCarthy.

## CHAPTER 1

### Aesop's Fables: The Story of a Mistake

#### Part One. The Aesopic Fable and *aliena insania*

Demades, the fourth-century Athenian orator, seems to have had a rather low opinion of Aesopic fables, as we learn from the following anecdote:<sup>1</sup>

Dêmadês ho rhêtôr dêmêgorôn pote en Athênais, ekeinôn mê panu ti autôi prosekhontôn, edeêthê autôn hopôs epitrebsôsin autôi Aisôpeion muthon eipein. tôn de sugkhôrêsantôn autôi arxamenos elege: "Dêmêtra kai khelidôn kai egkhelus tèn autên hodon ebadizon. genomenôn de autôn kata tina potamon hê men khelidôn eptê, hê de egkhelus katedu." kai tauta eipôn esiôpêsen. eromenôn de autôn "hê oun Dêmêtra ti epathen;" ephê "kekholôtai humin, hoitines ta tês poleôs pragmata easantes Aisôpeion muthon akouein anakhesthe."

Demades was speaking to the Athenians about political affairs but could not get their attention. He then suggested that he might tell an Aesopic fable and, with the audience's enthusiastic approval, he began: "Demeter, a swallow, and an eel had gone on a journey together. When they reached a river, the swallow flew up in the air and the eel leaped into the water." Having told this much of the story, Demades fell silent. The audience shouted, "But what about Demeter?" Demades replied, "*She* is angry with all of you for neglecting the affairs of the city and preferring instead to listen to an Aesopic fable [*Aisôpeion muthon*]."

Two thousand years later, I feel exactly like the members of Demades' Athenian audience: I really want to know what Demeter did. Demades teases us with a fable, but does not tell us what finally happens, and we have no other record of this fable from antiquity. We do not know what Demeter did, and without a finale the fable does not make any sense. As Demades' audience understood perfectly, the effect of an Aesopic fable hangs entirely on the ending of the story. The success of Demades' oratorical prank

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<sup>1</sup> Perry 63.

depends on the fact that his audience could recognize an Aesopic fable when they heard one and that they could anticipate -- in terms of the fable's formulaic structure -- what Demades was expected to say next. Demades introduces the protagonists of the story -- Demeter, the swallow, and the eel -- and then relates the simple plot, but the point of the story is centered on the question: what did Demeter do? Demades' audience is left in the same state of suspense one might feel upon hearing the first four lines of a limerick but not the rhyming fifth line, or upon reading the end of a "knock-knock" joke, but not being told "who" is there. Without its punch-line, the Aesopic fable is unfinished, and Demades exploits the audience's anticipatory desire for the story's punch-line in order to turn the fable against them, abusing them for that very desire. By speaking abusively to his audience, Demades is participating in the spirit of the Aesopic fable, which often ridicules and insults its audience. This anecdote about Demades thus tells us a great deal about the Aesopic fable -- its popularity, its structure, its tone -- yet the fable itself is unfinished: we do not know (and will never know) what finally happened to Demeter, the swallow, and the eel.

The response of Demades' audience shows that the Aesopic fable was a well-known genre, a living form of oral expression in ancient Greece, as it was also in ancient Rome (in Chapter 2 we will see how an Aesopic fable was reportedly used by the old Roman orator Menenius Agrippa in a moment of political crisis). Yet for us the Aesopic fable is no longer a living form of oral expression, and modern scholars seem unable or

unwilling to come up with a precise definition of the genre.<sup>2</sup> How are we supposed to recognize those fables over such a long stretch of time, recorded in the written texts that have (haphazardly) reached us from an antiquity? Or, to put it more simply: what is the definition of an Aesopic fable? Most recently, van Dijk has proposed that the Aesopic fable be defined as "a fictitious, metaphorical narrative."<sup>3</sup> While it is certainly true that Aesopic fables are indeed fictitious, metaphorical narratives, this definition does not begin to capture the distinctive quality of the Aesopic fable, especially the climax of the fable's little plot and the sense of a punchline at the end of the fable. As I will show in the following two chapters, the Aesopic fable was a highly structured genre, based both on a formulaic plot (as will be discussed in this chapter), and a distinctive method of formulating the moral of the story (as discussed in the subsequent chapter). The distinctive "feel" and function of Aesopic fables depended precisely on the characteristic way in which the plots of the fables and their morals were articulated.

More specifically, I will define the Aesopic fable as **a brief and witty exemplum based on the punishment or prevention of a mistake**. *Brevity* and *wit* are characteristic aspects of the Aesopic fable (especially of its function as an oral form of expression), and these aspects of the traditional fable cannot afford to be omitted from

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<sup>2</sup> For a review of definitions, see van Dijk (1997: 3-115; his definition appears on 113).

<sup>3</sup> Van Dijk describes this definition as a "synthesis" of ancient and modern theories but it is in fact identical to what he himself describes as the ancient consensus among ancient definitions of the fable (1997: 72). Van Dijk's own definition most closely resembles that of Theon, *muthos esti logos pseudês eikonizôn alêtheian* (cf. Hesychius s.v. muthos: *muthos: logos kenos, pseudês, eikonizôn tèn alêtheian*).

a definition of the genre. By considering the fables as *exempla*, I wish to reconsider what van Dijk calls the "metaphorical" quality of the fable, so that the didactic function of the fable becomes more clear. As an exemplum, the fable is a special class of metaphor, serving as a mirror in which we are compelled to see ourselves, or in which we compel others to see themselves. Yet aside from the fable's form, the most important aspect of this definition is its specification of the fables' contents: *an Aesopic fable tells the story of a mistake*. In some cases, the fable can take a positive form, in which a wise character is able to refrain from making a possible mistake. Much more commonly, however, the fable takes a negative form, in which a mistake is punished and the character who makes the mistake is ridiculed. As we will see, the Aesopic fable regularly combines verbal insult and physical injury, so that in the climax of the plot the foolish protagonist suffers some kind of violent loss or setback, while in the moral of the story he is subjected to a vicious verbal rebuke.

#### ***Nocumentum documentum*<sup>4</sup>**

As "a brief and witty exemplum based on the punishment or prevention of a mistake," the Aesopic fable takes a fundamentally negative approach to the world, in which wisdom itself is understood in terms of a potential mistake: the fool is someone who makes mistakes, while the wise person is someone who prevents them. The protagonists of Aesop's fables are sometimes clever enough to evade the snares of

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<sup>4</sup> Compare Columban (in Duff, 1954: 630): *Felix alterius cui sunt documenta flagella*. For the Aesopic fable as a kind of *documentum*, see Phaedrus 2.4: *Quantum homo bilinguis saepe concinnet mali, / documentum habere hinc stulta credulitas potest*.



mistaken judgment, but far more often they are simply foolish, not to mention greedy, reckless, indiscreet, and vindictive. It is a genre based on invective and insult rather than positive exhortation. The fables show us social relations built on shame and ridicule, which can be both vicious and comical at the same time. The didactic value of the fable depends entirely on the shameful punishment of ridiculous mistakes: wisdom is acquired through trial and error, and the best possible outcome is when we, the audience, can learn from the errors made by the characters inside the stories. Of course, this kind of didactic instruction often acquires a cruel and malicious dimension: rather than piously imparting good advice, Aesopic fables often provoke a superior snickering, the scornful satisfaction that comes from watching other people being punished for their mistakes. Aesopic fables are humorous, but it is a humor that bites.<sup>5</sup>

The notion of learning from mistakes (and more precisely learning from the *punishment* of mistakes) was a commonplace of ancient thought, and is well attested in various proverbial expressions. The mistake might be mythological, involving such venerable motifs as the Trojan horse: *sero sapiunt Phryges*, "the Trojans learned their lesson too late," which is to say that they realized their error only after bringing the Trojan horse inside the walls of their city and being punished on an epic scale.<sup>6</sup> On a less epic scale, one could say *piscator ictus sapit*, "once bitten (e.g., by a jelly fish), the

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<sup>5</sup> On the essentially humorous quality of the Aesopic fable, note the use of *geloios* as applied to the Aesopic fable in Aristophanes, *Wasps* 566: *Aisopou ti geloion*, something funny from Aesop.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion, see the citations in Erasmus, *Adagia* 28 = Tosi 937.

fisherman knows better."<sup>7</sup> A more abstract proverb tells us that the fool understands what is happening only after the deed is done, when it is too late to do anything about it, *factum stultus cognoscit*.<sup>8</sup> The fundamental assumption is that foolish people (which is to say, people in general) are able to learn only by making painful mistakes -- *quae nocent, docent*, "things that hurt are good teachers," or *malo accepto stultus sapit*, "having suffered some disaster, the fool knows better."<sup>9</sup>

The protagonist of these proverbs is the slow-witted fool, the Latin *stultus* (although we will meet many words for fools and foolishness in the course of this study: Latin fools are called *stultus* or *simplex*, while the wise man is *sapiens* or *callidus* or *vafer*;<sup>10</sup> the Greek fool is a *mataios* or *moros* or *euêthês*, while the wise man is *sophos* or *phronimos*). Unlike wise men who can anticipate the outcome and avoid making a mistake, fools are doomed to learn from the negative consequences of their own stupid choices. This is what Quintus Fabius Maximus argues in a speech reported by Livy:<sup>11</sup> "The only way of fighting the war with Hannibal," he insists, "is my way. This is shown not only by the outcome, the teacher of fools (*eventus, stultorum magister*), but by that

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<sup>7</sup> For a discussion, see the citations in Erasmus, *Adagia* 29.

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion, see the citations in Erasmus, *Adagia* 30.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion, see the citations in Erasmus, *Adagia* 31.

<sup>10</sup> On the vocabulary of Roman fools and foolishness, with some very useful folkloric comparisons, see Bettini's article on "Bruto lo sciocco" (1987). For the Christian reinterpretation of *simplex*, see the discussion of Odo of Cheriton's fables in Chapter 4.

<sup>11</sup> Livy, 22.39.10. Compare Democritus (B 76 Diels-Kranz): *Nêpiosin ou logos, alla xumforê ginetai didaskalos*, "the teacher of fools is not reason [*logos*] but disaster [*xumforê*]."

same process of reasoning which held good before, and will continue to do so without change as long as circumstances remain as they are." *Eventus stultorum magister*,<sup>12</sup> the outcome (usually disastrous) is the teacher of fools. To have disaster as your teacher is admittedly risky. If you survive the process, the best lesson you can learn is not to make the same mistake twice: *vulpes non iterum capitur laqueo*, the fox is not caught twice in the snare.<sup>13</sup> Of course, not everybody is given a second chance: presumably the Trojans would not bring a second wooden horse inside their walls a second time, but the lesson is lost on a fallen city. If there is a lesson to be learned here, it is for us, the audience outside the story, given that fools often pay a fatal price for their mistake, bringing an abrupt end to their education by trial and error.

This vicarious "learning from others' mistakes" is the basic didactic model behind the Aesopic fable: the fool may not have the opportunity to benefit from his own experience, but we can seize these benefits for ourselves. We can find good, *bonum*, in the evil, *malum*, that befalls others: *bonum est fugienda aspicere in alieno malo*, "it is good to observe what should be avoided in the misfortunes of others;"<sup>14</sup> *ex vitio alterius sapiens emendat suum*, "from another's fault, a wise man corrects his own;"<sup>15</sup> *multorum disce exemplo, quae facta sequaris, / quae fugias: vita est nobis aliena magistra*, "learn

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<sup>12</sup> The saying became a proverb in its own right, and is reported as such in Walther 8224a. For a discussion of the ancient citations, see Tosi 398.

<sup>13</sup> Tosi 397: *all' ouk authis alôpêx*. Compare also Horace, *Satires* 2.7.70: *Quae belua ruptis, / cum semel effugit, reddit se prava catenis?*

<sup>14</sup> Publilius Syrus 60 (in Duff, 1954: 21).

<sup>15</sup> Publilius Syrus 177 (in Duff, 1954: 38).

from the examples provided by many persons what deeds to imitate / and what deeds to avoid: the life of others is our teacher."<sup>16</sup> Pliny the Elder observes that this was a common maxim, *ut vulgo dixere*:<sup>17</sup> *optimumque est, ut vulgo dixere, aliena insania frui*, "as the saying goes, the best thing is to profit from other people's senseless actions."<sup>18</sup>

### *The Story of a Mistake*

The plot structure of the Aesopic fable is thus a perfect example of what Pliny would call *aliena insania*. Aesopic fables tell the story of the foolish mistakes made by others, culminating in catastrophes which -- if we are wise -- warn us about what to avoid. The structure of an Aesopic plot revolves around a mistake, and the mistake is also a topic of conversation in the fable: the characters involved in the story comment on the stupidity of the other characters, or even on their own stupidity, with a formulaic vocabulary that continually calls attention to the mistake that lies at the heart of the plot. The formulaic quality of both the plot and the dialogue found in Aesop's fables can be illustrated by any number of examples. Although each Aesopic fable has its own unique features and details, the generic aspects are easily detectable. Despite the variety of characters and catastrophes, each fable depends on a mistake and its outcome, an error

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<sup>16</sup> Cato 3.13 (in Duff, 1954: 612).

<sup>17</sup> Compare the same notion in Tibullus 3.6.43-44: *Felix quicunque dolore / Alterius disces posse carere tuo*.

<sup>18</sup> Pliny, *Natural History* 18.6.3.

and its potentially disastrous *eventus*.

It is important to note that this basically negative orientation of the plot, its "focus on foolishness," means that the protagonist of the fable is usually somebody who is stupid, not somebody who is wise. Admittedly, there is sometimes a wise protagonist who manages to avoid making a mistake, but this form of the plot is far less common than the negative plot with a foolish protagonist. In both types of plot, there is often a trickster character, somebody who is trying to induce the protagonist to make a mistake, but this trickster character is incidental to the plot: he is not the protagonist. The formulaic structure of the plot demands that the protagonist be either a foolish character who makes a mistake or a wise character who prevents one; in either case the trickster character is only a catalyst. For a typical example of the foolish protagonist and the provocative trickster, we can begin with the story of the goat and the fox in the well:<sup>19</sup>

Alôpêx pesousa eis phrear epanagkes emene pros tên anabasin amêkhanousa. tragos de dipsêi sunekhomenos, hôs egeneto kata to auto phrear, theasamenos autên epunthaneto ei kalon eiê to hudôr. hê de tên suntukhian asmenisamenê polun epainon tou hudatos kateteine, legousa hôs khrêston eiê, kai dê kai auton katabênai parêinei.

A fox fell into a well and had to stay there without any prospect of getting out. A thirsty goat came to the well and, when he saw the fox, asked her if the water was good. The fox was delighted with this opportunity [*tên suntukhian*], and sang the praises of the water at great length, telling how good it was, and inviting the goat to come on down.

The fox is a common character in the Aesopic fable, and she is very often a trickster figure, as is the case here. Yet precisely because she is a trickster, the fox is not the hero

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<sup>19</sup> Perry 9. Bodker 778 cites an Indian version with a baboon instead of a fox: the baboon jumps on the goat's back and then out of the well but does not come back to rescue the goat.

of this story; instead, it is the goat who is being put to the test -- a test which he fails.

tou de ameletêtôs kathallomenou dia to monên horan tote tèn epithumain, kai hama tòi tèn dipsan sbesai meta tês alôpekos skopountos tèn anodon, khrêsimon ti hê alôpêx ephê epinenoêkenai eis tèn amphoterôn sôterian: "ean gar thelêsêis tous emprosthious podas tôi toikhôi prosereisas egklinai kai ta kerata, anadramousa autê dia tou sou nôtou kai se anaspasô."

The goat jumped in without stopping to think it over [*ameletêtôs*], because he had his mind on nothing but his thirst. As soon as he had quenched his thirst, he began to reflect along with the fox about how to get out. The fox said she had a good idea how to save them both. "If you will brace your forefeet against the wall and bend your horns over against it, I'll run up your back and pull you up after me."

Even though the fox and the goat are reflecting "together" about their common plight, there is a fundamental disparity between these animals. The fox is using reason to think ahead, and leading the goat down into the well is part of her plan. The goat, on the other hand, has no plan of his own; he is acting on impulse, not reason. Just as he was eager to satisfy his thirst, he is now eager to get out of the well, and witlessly agrees to the fox's suggestion:

tou de kai pros tèn deuteran parainesin hetoimôs hupêretêsantos, hê alôpêx anallomenê dia tôn skelôn autou epi ton nôton anebê kai ap' ekeinou epi ta kerata diereisamenê epi to stoma tou phreatos anelthousa apêllatteto. tou de tragou memphomenou autên hôs tas homologias parabainousan, epistrapheisa eipen "ô houtos, all' ei tosautas phrenas eikhes hosas en tôi pôgôni trikhas, ou proteron dê katabebêkeis prin ê tèn anodon eskepsô."

The goat readily fell in line with this second suggestion also, and the fox jumped up from between the goat's legs, went up his back, and then, by standing on his horns, she reached the mouth of the well and started away. When the goat complained that the fox was breaking their agreement, she turned around and said, "My good fellow, if your wits [*phrenas*] were as abundant as the hairs in your beard, you wouldn't have gotten down there before you thought about how you would get out."

As the story comes to an end, the goat has suffered a physical setback but, even more

importantly, he is subjected to the fox's biting insults. It is not so much that the fox is the hero of the story, but rather that the goat is the anti-hero, a foolish protagonist whose mistakes can teach us how to avoid the deceptive propositions of the foxes of this world. Because of this underlying didactic orientation, the fox does not praise her own cleverness (she is not a positive exemplum for us to follow); instead, the fox castigates the goat's stupidity and the catastrophic situation in which he finds himself at the end of the story. There is nothing gentle about the didactic model of an Aesopic fable, in which the fundamental tendency towards negative exempla -- learning by mistakes -- determines not only the negative outcome of the plot, but also the insulting words that usually bring the story to a close.

Of course, this is not to say that all goats are foolish in Aesop: it is equally possible for a goat to be wise<sup>20</sup> and for a fox to be foolish,<sup>21</sup> as we will see later on. Because the force of the Aesopic fable follows the plot rather than the fixed attributes of any of the characters, it is indeed possible for a goat to refrain from making a stupid choice, and for a fox to commit a foolish error. In the world of Aesop, all animals are liable to foolishness, and the outcome of any encounter in a fable can never be predicted by the characters alone. Moreover, even when there is a positive outcome to the plot and the protagonist of the story manages to make a wise choice, there is still an emphasis on the potential foolishness, on the mistake which didn't happen -- but which came very close to happening. Thus, even when a goat acts intelligently and escapes disaster, the

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<sup>20</sup> For the wise goat, see Perry 157, cited on p. 12.

<sup>21</sup> For the foolish fox, see Perry 241, cited on p. 14.

plot is still defined in terms of a mistake, as we can see in the following fable about a wolf and a goat:<sup>22</sup>

Lukos theasamenos aiga epi tinos krêmnou nemomenên, epeidê ouk êdunato autês ephikesthai, katôterô parêinei autên katabênai, mê kai pesêi lathousa, legôn hôs ameinôn ho par' autôi leimôn, epei kai hê poa sphodra euanthês. hê de apekrinato pros auton "all' ouk eme epi nomên kaleis, autos de trophês aporeis."

A wolf saw a goat browsing on a cliff and, since he couldn't get at her, he urged her to come down before she fell, pointing out that the pasture was much better down where he was, and that the grass was lush. The goat answered, "That would all be very well if I didn't know that you are not so much interested in inviting me to pasture as you are in your own lack of food."

The story of the wolf and the goat is a kind of structural inversion of the story of the fox and the goat. The Aesopic fable can take the form of a story with a negative outcome based on the punishment of a mistake, as when the goat foolishly listens to the tricky predator (i.e., the fox in the well), or a story with a positive outcome based on the prevention of a mistake, as when the goat wisely refuses to listen to the tricky predator (i.e., the wolf in the grass). Despite the changes in surface details -- fox in the well, wolf in the grass -- these two fables have plots that are obviously variations (positive or negative) on a common theme. Avianus provides a further variation on this same theme. In this case, he repeats the positive version of the story in which the goat manages to prevent a mistake, but he casts a lion rather than a wolf as the seductive trickster:<sup>23</sup>

Viderat excelsa pascentem rupe capellam,  
comminus esuriens cum leo ferret iter,  
et prior "heus" inquit "praeruptis ardua saxis  
linque nec hirsutis pascua quaere iugis;

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<sup>22</sup> Perry 157.

<sup>23</sup> Avianus 26 = Perry 157.



sed cytisi croceum per prata virentia florem  
et glaucas salices et thyma grata pete."  
illa gemens "desiste, precor, fallaciter" inquit  
"securam placidis instimulare dolis.  
vera licet moneas, maiora pericula tollas,  
tu tamen his dictis non facis esse fidem:  
nam quamvis rectis constet sententia verbis,  
suspectam hanc rabidus consiliator habet."

A hungry lion happened to see along the way a goat grazing high up on a cliff. The lion spoke up and said, "Oh my, you really should abandon those steep places with their rocky ridges and not look for food on the prickly peaks. Come graze in the green meadows abounding in yellow clover blossoms and bright willow branches and sweet thyme." But the goat groaned and said, "Please stop trying to trick me out of my serenity with your beguiling lies [*placidis dolis*]. Although your observations might be true and you might save me from some serious danger, I still do not trust what you say: even when advice is spoken with true words, the hunger of the speaker still arouses suspicion."

In both the Greek (wolf) and Latin (lion) versions of this story, the goat has the "last word," in which the enticements of the dangerously hungry adversary (wolf/lion) are generalized to any condition in which advice is being given and received. The moral of the story is that if your advisor is hungry (and more specifically, hungry for you -- your money, your friendship, your talents), then you must be quite suspicious of any advice he might offer. The foolish goat who met the fox in the well was not so wise; he was thinking only of his thirst -- "oh the water is so sweet and fresh!" -- and so he jumped down in the well. The wise goat, however, when faced with the wolf's blandishments -- "oh the grass is so sweet and green!" -- knows better than to trust his natural enemy. The hero of the story is tempted to make a mistake, but is able to stop himself in time. This positive form of the Aesopic fable is still the story of a mistake, but now it is a mistake *prevented*. The result is a sort of non-story, a fable with a non-plot. It is a story that "doesn't take place," so to speak. The goat is not any better off at the end of the

story than he was at the beginning; he has simply managed to keep from making a stupid mistake, which is the best outcome that an Aesopic hero can hope for. By analyzing the plot in terms of these positive and negative variations, we can see why the negative form of the Aesopic fable is so much more successful: the positive exempla are somehow empty, without that culminating moment in the plot where we would expect the mistake to be punished verbally and/or physically.

One of the most interesting varieties of the Aesopic plot shows what happens when it is the would-be trickster himself who becomes the foolish protagonist of the fable. In these stories of "the trickster tricked," the punishing *eventus* is turned against the would-be wise guy, showing that he is really the biggest *stultus* of them all. For a typical example of "the trickster tricked," we can consider the fate of the fox as she attempts to lure a locust down out of a tree. The story begins with a by-now familiar pattern: either the locust will foolishly fly down to the tricky fox (as the foolish goat joined the fox in the well),<sup>24</sup> or else the locust will wisely refuse to be tricked (like the wise goat who spurned the wolf/lion).<sup>25</sup> In this case, however, a third possibility takes shape, and the instructive mistake emerges from an unexpected angle of the plot. It turns out that is not the locust who is being put to the test, but the fox.<sup>26</sup>

Tettix epi tinos hupsêlou dendrou êiden. alôpêx de boulomenê auton kataphagein toiouton ti epenoêsen. antikrus stasa ethaumazen autou tèn euphônian kai parekalei katabênai, legousa hoti epithumei theasasthai pêlikon zôion têlikauta phtheggetai. ka'keinos huponoêsas autês tèn enedran phullon apospasas kathêke.

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<sup>24</sup> Perry 9, cited on p. 9.

<sup>25</sup> Perry 157, cited on p. 12.

<sup>26</sup> Perry 241.

prosdramousês de <autês> hôs epi ton tettiga, ephê "alla peplanêsai, ô hautê, ei hupelabes me katabêsesthai: egô gar ap' ekeinou alôpekas phulattomai aph' hou en aphodeumati alôpekos ptera tettigos etheasamên."

A locust was singing from the top of a tall tree. A fox wanted to eat the locust and thought up the following trick. She stood looking up in admiration at the locust's fine voice and urged him to come down, explaining that she wanted to see the size of the creature with so great a voice. The locust anticipated [*huponoêsas*] the fox's trap, and so pulled off a leaf and let it fall. As the fox pounced upon it, thinking it was the locust, the locust then said, "You made a blunder [*peplanêsai*], my friend, if you supposed I would come down, for I've been on my guard against foxes ever since the time I saw locust wings in some fox dung."

In the end, it is the fox who makes a mistake and who thus provides the object lesson of the fable. The fox fails to get the meal she expected and is verbally rebuked by the locust: "you made a blunder, my friend." The locust's verbal rebuke explicitly designates the fox as the loser in this exchange; even more important than the fox's failure to eat the locust is her final subjugation to the locust's biting insult. Moreover, the locust explains that he is someone who has learned from the mistakes of others, specifically, from other locusts who were foolishly eaten by other foxes in other versions of the same story: "I've been on my guard against foxes ever since the time I saw locust wings in some fox dung." By every standard of natural history, it is an absurd story -- but by the didactic assumptions of an Aesopic fable, it makes perfect sense. In this Aesopic fable, the fates of the fox and the locust are all a kind of education, the result of learning from mistakes.

Although in this story the fox fails to trick the locust, there is a very famous fable about a fox who manages to trick another character seated in a tree: this is the famous story of "the fox and the crow and the cheese." Once again, the plot shows a fox who

is trying to secure an edible object that is out of reach, high in a treetop. This time, however, the object is no longer a locust, but a piece of cheese dangling from the beak of a crow. Unlike the wise locust, this foolish crow will allow himself to be outwitted by that fox, as Phaedrus explains in his verse adaptation of the fable:<sup>27</sup>

Qui se laudari gaudet verbis subdolis  
fere dat poenas turpi paenitentia.  
Cum de fenestra corvus raptum caseum  
comesse vellet celsa residens arbore,  
vulpes invidit, deinde sic coepit loqui:  
"O qui tantum, corve, pennarum est nitor!  
quantum decoris corpore et vultu geris!  
si vocem haberes, nulla prior ales foret."  
at ille stultus, dum vult vocem ostendere  
lato ore emisit caseum; quem celeriter  
dolosa vulpes avidis rapuit dentibus.  
tum demum ingemuit corvi deceptus stupor.

He who takes delight in being flattered by deceitful speeches [*verbis subdolis*] is bound to be punished in shameful disgrace [*dat poenas turpi paenitentia*]. A crow had snatched a cheese from out of a window and sitting up high in a tree prepared to eat the cheese, but a fox greedily saw what was happening, and began to speak as follows: "O crow, how splendid are your feathers! What a graceful body you have and what a fine face! If only you had a voice to match, no bird would outrank you." And that foolish crow [*at ille stultus*], opened his mouth wide to display his voice and he dropped the cheese; the deceitful fox [*dolosa vulpes*] seized the cheese quickly with her greedy teeth, and only then did the astonished crow bewail [*ingemuit*] how he had been tricked.

As in the story of "the fox and the goat in the well,"<sup>28</sup> the focus is not on the cleverness of the fox as a positive exemplum, but on the stupidity of the crow as a negative exemplum -- *at ille stultus*, as Phaedrus says of the wretched bird. This stupid crow is a perfect example of the proverbial *factum stultus cognoscit*: the fool realizes his mistake

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<sup>27</sup> Phaedrus 1.13 = Perry 124.

<sup>28</sup> Perry 9, cited on p. 9.

only after the deed is done, that is, after he has lost his cheese. The fable is didactic but it is not meant to teach us to be like the fox. Instead, it is meant to teach us to be *not* like the crow, *ille stultus*.

### ***A Structural Definition of the Aesopic Fable***

As we can see from this series of stories -- the fox luring the goat down into the well, the goat resisting the invitations of the lion and the wolf to come down into the plain, the fox being fooled by the locust while the crow is fooled by the fox -- Aesopic fables are marked by a feeling of "sameness." There is a persistent, recurring similarity that is palpably present even when the fables themselves vary in their details, involving a large cast of characters in an assortment of comic situations. Indeed, once the rules of the genre are grasped (consciously or unconsciously), it is possible to compose perfectly acceptable Aesopic fables as variations on a theme. For example, the story of "the fox and the goat in the well"<sup>29</sup> can be inverted, so that the goat could simply refuse the fox's invitation to join her in the well: "You must think me a fool, O fox, if you think I will get down into a well when I can see no way to get out." In other words, the names of the characters and the specific nature of situation can remain the same, while the story shifts from a negative to a positive exemplum. Similarly, the plot can remain the same and the characters can change: the fox can be replaced by a lion or a wolf or a bear, while the goat can be replaced by a locust or a crow. The shifting actors and outcomes of Aesopic fables provide the basis for an extremely prolific genre. Yet this is also the

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<sup>29</sup> Perry 9, cited on p. 9.

reason why fables are so difficult to classify and catalog: when is one fable "the same" as another fable? How much variation on a theme will the defining structure of a fable allow? What, in fact, is the defining structure of a fable? To answer such questions, it would seem most productive to turn to the sort of structural analysis which Vladimir Propp produced for the Russian fairy tale, defining that genre in terms of a finite series of narrative functions able to generate a potentially endless supply of actual tales.<sup>30</sup> Yet no such analysis has been attempted for the Aesopic fables of Greece and Rome. Instead, Aesopic fables have been subjected only to "motif analysis" and "tale type" classification, but the results do not contribute at all to our understanding of this genre's underlying structure or function. The Aesopic fables are dispersed hither and thither throughout Stith Thompson's motif index, which is vaguely organized according to superficial content but with no attention to any kind of internal structure. Stith Thompson thus classifies approximately half of the Aesopic fables with J numbers, "Fools (and other unwise persons)," but there are also a large number of K numbers, "Deceptions," along with a fair number of U, "The Nature of Life" and W, "Traits of Character" (plus a smattering of A, "Mythological Motifs"; B, "Animals"; L, "Reversals of Fortune"; N, "Chance and Fate"; and Q, "Rewards and Punishments").<sup>31</sup> In short, the admittedly arbitrary

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<sup>30</sup> For an essential revision and update of Propp, see Greimas (1983); Bettini's Proppian analysis of the plots of Plautus (1982) depends heavily on Greimas. The most productive elaboration of Propp for folklore classification is Permiakov (1968).

<sup>31</sup> Perry attempts to provide Stith Thompson numbers for all of his fables; Haim Schwarzbaum (1979) also attempts to provide Stith Thompson numbers in his commentary on Berechiah ha-Nakdan's Hebrew version of Aesop. Taken together, these two authors identify 442 total motifs, which are distributed throughout the Thompson scheme as follows: A (Mythological motifs) - 12 fables; B (Animals) - 14 fables; C

classifications which Thompson proposed for folklore in general<sup>32</sup> are not very well suited to the specific nature of the Aesopic fable as a folklore genre.<sup>33</sup>

The fact that most Aesopic fables find their way into Thompson's categories of "Fools" and "Deceptions" is not surprising, given that the formulaic plot of the Aesopic fable tells the story of a mistake. An Aesopic fable can be the story of a "Fool" because it is about someone who makes a mistake, and it can be the story of a "Deception" when the foolish person is somehow tricked into making that mistake. Yet this superficial distinction between the story of a "fool" and the story of a "deception" actually obscures the underlying plot structure which is the same in either case.

The scholar who has done the most to advance this line of analysis is Janina Abramowska, whose study of Ignacy Krasicki's Polish fables represents an enormous

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(Tabu) - 2 fables; D (Magic) - 1 fables; J (The Wise and the Foolish) - 246 fables; K (Deceptions) - 61 fables; L (Reversal of Fortune) - 15 fables; M (Ordaining the Future) - 3 fables; N (Chance and Fate) - 16 fables; Q (Rewards and Punishments) - 10 fables; T (Sex) - 4 fables; U (Nature of Life) - 32 fables; W (Traits of Character) - 21 fables; X (Humor) - 3 fables; Z (Miscellaneous) - 2 fables.

<sup>32</sup> Thompson himself admits that the work has no theoretical basis (1936: 19): "For the purpose of deciding on inclusion or exclusion, I have had no hard and fast principle. When the term motif is employed, it is always in a very loose sense. In general, any item in tales that other investigators have made notes on has been accepted. Aside from this general principle, no rule has been followed in choosing what should go into the classification. This classification of materials is the result of a gradual evolution, not of any preconceived plan."

<sup>33</sup> Permiakov has made the most cogent critique of Thompson's motif project (1968: 74): "[Thompson's motifs] have been frequently, and loosely, used to denote any component element of a supra-phrasal cliché, regardless of which structural plane [i.e., narrative composition, logico-semiotic, and image-object] that element belongs to. Each plane has its own structural elements and, vice versa, each element refers to a definite plane. Failure to distinguish among the latter only leads to confusion."

contribution to the study of Aesopic fables in general.<sup>34</sup> Abramowska defined Krasicki's fables in terms of *the negative verification of a mistaken judgment*, which yields two narrative functions: the mistake, and its correction.<sup>35</sup> Abramowska designates these functions with the letters "M" and "R" -- "M" for *mylący się*, which can also be rendered as "M" in English, the "maker of a mistake," and "R" for *rezoner*, which can also be rendered as "R" in English, the "reasoner," the function that "negatively verifies the mistaken judgment."<sup>36</sup> These two narrative functions are structural elements which can be realized by various types of character combinations and plots in each individual fable. So, for example, a typical Aesopic fable can involve a struggle between two characters (as in the story of "the fox and the goat in the well"<sup>37</sup>) such that each of the two narrative functions, "M" and "R," is associated with individual characters in the story: the goat is "M" and the fox is "R." Moreover, it can also happen that the "M" and "R" functions are combined in a single character making it possible to tell a fable about a

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<sup>34</sup> Janina Abramowska, "*Bajki Ignacego Krasickiego, czyli krytyka sztuki sądenia*" (1972). Ignacy Krasicki was a poet of the Polish Enlightenment who translated many Greek and Latin authors into Polish. His *Bajki* (*Fables*) fall squarely within the Aesopic tradition. Given the traditional "Aesopcity" of Krasicki's fables, it is not surprising that Abramowska's work on Krasicki has a wider applicability to the genre as a whole.

<sup>35</sup> For narrative functions and actantial structures, see Greimas's *Structural Semantics* (1966). For a Greimasian analysis of an Aesopic fable, see Fiorella Menna (1983); for a Greimasian analysis of Roman comedy, see Bettini (1982).

<sup>36</sup> Abramowska proposes this model in her "*Bajki Ignacego Krasickiego*" (1972). In some ways Abramowska's model resembles Nojgaard's model of *action de choix* followed by *évaluation* (*La fable antique*, 1964), although Abramowska's model is simpler (and more flexible) than Nojgaard's approach. For Abramowska's comments on Nojgaard, see her more recent monograph, *Polska bajka ezopowa* (1991: 14).

<sup>37</sup> Perry 9, cited on p. 9.



foolish protagonist who brings about his own destruction without anybody else's assistance, or a wise protagonist who manages to prevent himself from making a mistake. In still other cases, a single function can be shared between several characters, as when a whole herd of sheep or flock of birds together commit a mistake, or when the "R" function is carried out by two animals in some kind of alliance. Thus, it is not a question of how many actors there are on the stage at any given moment. Rather, what is important are the two functions that move the plot forward: the function of the mistake and the function of its correction which combine to both open and close the story of the fable. The pairing of these two narrative functions also explains in what sense the Aesopic fable is a didactic genre: the didactic element is part of the actual narrative structure which demonstrates the lesson that is then made explicit in the moral of the story.<sup>38</sup>

It is important to note that this structural model of the narrative imposes no limitations on the topics or themes that may be treated in the fables, nor does it impose any particular moral point of view. While it is possible to analyze the fables of a single author in terms of distinctive themes (as I will do with Phaedrus's fables in Chapter 3), it is not possible to define the genre itself in terms of content.<sup>39</sup> As a whole, the Aesopic genre must be defined in terms of its form. In fact, the Aesopic fable is

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<sup>38</sup> Abramowska (1972: 4): "somebody teaches somebody something or gives them a lesson."

<sup>39</sup> There is, however, a persistent sentiment in the scholarship on Aesopic fables that these are predominantly, or even exclusively, the stories of a subaltern class. For the most committed "subaltern" reading of Aesop, see LaPenna (1961).

structurally constrained to an extraordinary degree: the relatively small number of plots repeat over and over again, as any survey of the stories can demonstrate. Yet at the same time that the plots are extremely limited, the Aesopic fable is thematically open to all manner of content. The narrative structure of the fable, which juxtaposes "mistaken" and "correct" points of view, generates a space for any kind of social dispute or interpersonal conflict, but the genre in no sense determines the ideological orientation or the subject matter of the conflict itself. Many Aesopic fables emphasize the plight of the exploited and the oppressed, but even a cursory study of the ancient Greek corpus shows that there are many Aesopic fables of a conservative and tyrannical tendency as well. Weak animals like the rabbit or the sheep can sometimes outsmart a strong but stupid animal, but not all weak animals have a compensatory intelligence, and not all strong animals are stupid. The only requirement set by the genre is that somebody make a mistake, or at least run the risk of making a mistake; whether the butt of the joke is a wolf or a rabbit or a turtle or a lion is left entirely up to the storyteller. The form of the Aesopic fable is thus open to both kings and commoners, and it can be used by combatants on both sides of any social or political struggle.<sup>40</sup> In this sense Aesopic fables are very much like proverbs, another folk genre which is not limited to a single social class or to a single ideological perspective.<sup>41</sup> Like Aesopic fables, proverbs are defined by a certain

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<sup>40</sup> For the same fable appropriated by opposite sides in a political contest, see Patterson's *Fables of Power* (1991), which traces the use and interpretation of traditional Aesopic fables in the political discourse of Renaissance and early modern Europe.

<sup>41</sup> For the thematic openness of proverbs, see Permiakov (1979: 173): "Proverbs are signs of situations which are infinitely varied, and include many that are directly opposite in character. Herein lies the secret of the long-noted but still largely unexplained mutual

"feel," by characteristic forms of expression, regardless of the particular content that the proverb might express.<sup>42</sup> Although the surface features of the fables may be in flux -- different characters, different realization of the plot structure, different languages and literary conventions -- the abiding structure of "the mistake and its correction" continues to make the fables recognizable and somehow familiar. Indeed, it often seems as if we have heard each fable somewhere else before, even when we are hearing it for the first time. There are a limited number of plots that this narrative structure can support, but the Aesopic genre exploits the entire range of plot options in order to generate a complex array of stories and morals from this simple, invariant structure.

### ***The Mistake and its Correction ("M-versus-R," "M=R")***

The most obvious way in which the "M" and "R" functions can be combined to produce a story is when one character, the "M" character, makes a mistake that is then corrected and punished by the "R" character, as in Phaedrus's version of "the crane and the wolf."<sup>43</sup>

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contradictoriness of proverbial sayings and of the logical system of proverbs in general. It is the logic of common sense." So, for example, proverbial wisdom tells us that "too many cooks spoil the soup" but also "the more the merrier." The corpus of Aesopic fables contains room for similar contradictions.

<sup>42</sup> On the relationship between proverbs and fables, see Pack Carnes (1988). Van Dijk (1997: 97) provides useful information on the relationship between riddles, proverbs, and fables in terms of ancient terminology, such as *ainos*, *logos*, *muthos*, and *paroimia*. Erasmus already provides a lengthy and quite sophisticated discussion in the introduction to his *Adagia*.

<sup>43</sup> Phaedrus 1.8 = Perry 156. For a study of this fable in a specifically Roman context, see Bloomer (1997: 96-97). Aelian 3.11 identifies a similar situation in the natural world, in which Egyptian plovers extract leeches from crocodile's mouths. The

Qui pretium meriti ab improbis desiderat,  
bis peccat: primum quoniam indignos adiuvat,  
impune abire deinde quia iam non potest.  
Os devoratum fauce cum haereret lupi,  
magno dolore victus coepit singulos  
inlicere pretio ut illud extraherent malum.  
tandem persuasa est iure iurando gruis,  
gulaeque credens colli longitudinem  
periculosam fecit medicinam lupo.  
pro quo cum pactum flagitaret praemium,  
"Ingrata es" inquit "ore quae nostro caput  
incolume abstuleris et mercedem postules."

Someone who expects a reward for favors done to scoundrels is guilty of two mistakes [*bis peccat*]: first, because he helps those who are unworthy and second, because he cannot even hope to escape punishment himself. A bone gobbled up by a wolf had got stuck in his throat, and stricken by terrible pain he began to implore the animals one after another to extract the dreadful bone, in return for a reward. Finally the crane was persuaded by his sworn promise, and she entrusted the length of her neck into the wolf's throat, carrying out this risky cure. But when she demanded the fee which had been promised, the wolf said, "You ungrateful creature! You safely extracted your head from our jaws, and yet you demand a further bonus."

In this fable, the crane is marked as the "M" character (*bis peccat*, as Phaedrus says), while the wolf carries out the "R" function. Yet this "R" character, the wolf, is not "right" in a moral or ethical sense. It is only in terms of the fable's specific plot that the wolf can be called "R;" he verbally and physically corrects the mistake made by the crane. This moral ambiguity was also a factor in the story of the foolish goat who was tricked by the fox in the well:<sup>44</sup> both that goat and this crane receive a poor return for

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Buddhist Javaskuna-jataka version involves a woodpecker who extracts a bone from a lion's throat (in Cowell, III.17-18): fully aware that the lion might choose to devour him, the woodpecker props open the lion's mouth with a stick before he dares to put his head into the lion's throat.

<sup>44</sup> Perry 9, cited on p. 9.

the services they perform for the fox and the wolf respectively. Yet, as the logic of the Aesopic fable demands, the poor return that these animals receive must be a function of some mistake that they made: specifically, the mistake of expecting a good return from a bad customer.<sup>45</sup> Because this choking wolf is desperate, he makes a promise which he has no intention of keeping: he is not a good-hearted wolf. Nevertheless, the wolf is not stupid, no matter what other faults he might have. The point of the fable depends rather on the stupidity of the crane, who is a fool doomed to pay the price for her mistake (or, rather, her double mistake: *bis peccat*).<sup>46</sup> Although she may be morally justified, the crane nevertheless suffers a negative outcome, just like the foolish goat in the story of "the fox and the goat in the well."<sup>47</sup> Indeed, the crane should consider herself lucky, as the wolf viciously observes: he might have proceeded to eat the crane, punishing her physically as well as verbally. Yet the crane does not have to die to illustrate the point of the story: the verbal rebuke of the wolf's sharp "last words" is

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<sup>45</sup> This is an explicit premise of Abramowska's model (1972: 4): "R does not have to be morally right; it is enough that he is correct in his understanding of the situation."

<sup>46</sup> In this sense, it makes sense that Abramowska would evolve her model from a study of Krasicki's fables. Of all the writers of literary fables in both the ancient, medieval and modern traditions, Krasicki is perhaps the most pitiless, and thus the closest to the folkloric origins of the genre, which are untouched by sentimental sensibilities. As Abramowska remarks (1972: 4): "Krasicki does not empathize with the wronged victims. Rather, he seems to take the stand of the wolf against the sheep, and with pitiless approbation he emphasizes the downfall of the credulous mouse, the naive colt, or the stubborn bulls."

<sup>47</sup> Perry 9.

sufficient.<sup>48</sup> Whether the crane is eaten by the wolf, or merely insulted by him, she is a negative exemplum that we would not want to imitate. She may escape with her life, but only because her humiliation is punishment enough.

The story of "the crane and the wolf" thus shows how the "M" and "R" functions can be acted out by individual characters on the stage of the plot, with one character cast as "M" and the opposing character cast as "R." In addition, it is also quite common for Aesopic fables to feature a collective "M" character instead of a single individual: a mistake can be made by a whole flock of birds, a herd of sheep, a school of fish, and so on. A typical fable about a collective "M" tells what happens when a group of foolish animals decide to choose a king, as in Phaedrus's story of the doves who recklessly elect the kite as their protector:<sup>49</sup>

Qui se committit homini tutandum improbo,  
auxilium dum requirit, exitium invenit.  
Columbae saepe cum fugissent milvum,  
et celeritate pennae vitassent necem,  
consilium raptor vertit ad fallaciam  
et genus inerme tali decepit dolo:  
Quare sollicitum potius aevum ducitis  
quam regem me creatis icto foedere,  
qui vos ab omni tutas praestem iniuria?  
illae credentes tradunt sese milvo;

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<sup>48</sup> Still, Marie de France's wolf has some lingering doubts about his decision: verbal abuse is all very good, but it does not fill the stomach (7.31-32 = Perry 156; translation by Harriet Spiegel). *"Tu es," fet il, "fole pruvee, / Quant de mei es vive eschapee, / Que tu requers autre lüer! / (Que) de ta char ai grant desirer, / Mei, ki sui lus, tieng jeo pur fol - / Que od mes denz ne trenchai tun col,"* "You have been proved a fool," he said; / You owe me thanks that you're not dead. / Now more reward you dare require! / Your flesh provoked a great desire, / And I, the wolf, am fool instead -- Losing my chance to bite off your head."

<sup>49</sup> Phaedrus 1.31 = Perry 486.

qui regnum adeptus coepit vesci singulas  
et exercere imperium saevis unguibus.  
tunc de reliquiis una: Merito plectimur,  
huic spiritum praedoni quae commisimus.

The person who turns to a scoundrel for help when he is in trouble will bring about his own destruction. When the doves had many a time fled from the kite and escaped death by the swiftness of their wings, the predator tried giving deceptive advice, and he fooled the defenseless flock with this trick [*dolo*]: "Why do you prefer this anxious way of life? Instead you could strike an agreement and make me your king, so that I would keep you safe from all possible danger." The doves believed the kite and put themselves in his care. Having been made king, the kite began to feast on them one by one, asserting his authority with fierce talons. Finally one of the surviving doves admitted: "We deserve to be punished [*merito plectimur*] for having given our life's breath over to this brigand."

As the "last words" of this fable show, it is not only the "R" character who can identify and rebuke the mistake that has been made. Instead, the "M" character can make a self-deprecating remark with which to conclude the fable. This is a distinctive, and often somewhat bizarre, feature of the Aesopic fable: it is not enough that the "M" character suffers some kind of loss or punishment, but he may also be called upon to confess his stupidity and admit his mistake -- even as he is about to meet his doom, as in this fable. In order to have the "M" character speak the fable's last words, Phaedrus spares one bird just long enough to pronounce the self-castigating moral of the story. There are various formulae of self-criticism used when the "M" character pronounces the moral of the story: "Oh," he might say, "what a fool I was..." or even "oh, I deserve to die, because of my own stupidity..." Again, the fact that the kite is undeniably a criminal has no bearing on the moral of the story: like the perfidious fox and the ungrateful wolf, the kite is the "winner" in this contest of wits. Yet this does not mean that the kite is the hero of the story or that he is meant to serve as a positive exemplum. Instead, the

vicious kite serves only as a means of punishing the mistake made by the doves; he is "R" to their "M." The point of the story, as always, focuses on the mistake. The "M" character, the foolish flock of birds, is the hero (or anti-hero) of the story. Phaedrus expects us to learn not from the behavior of the kite, but rather from the stupid choice made by the birds, and from the instructive punishment that they suffer, and rightfully so (*merito*).

In addition to the contest staged between the "M" and "R" characters in a fable, it is also possible for the "M" and "R" functions to be combined in a single character, in which one character plays both roles at once, a structure that can be designated as "M=R." These are the Aesopic fables in which an animal is his own worst enemy, foolishly bringing about his own destruction and then castigating himself for his stupidity. A famous example of a fable based on the actions and reactions of a single character is the story of "the stag admiring his reflection," as we can see in Phaedrus's version:<sup>50</sup>

Laudatis utiliora quae contempseris  
saepe inveniri testis haec narratio est.  
Ad fontem cervus, cum bibisset, restitit  
et in liquore vidit effigiem suam.  
ibi dum ramosa mirans laudat cornua  
crurumque nimiam tenuitatem vituperat,  
venantum subito vocibus conterritus  
per campum fugere coepit, et cursu levi  
canes elusit. silva tum excepti ferum,  
in qua retentis inpeditus cornibus  
lacerari coepit morsibus saevis canum.  
Tunc moriens edidisse vocem hanc dicitur:  
O me infelicem, qui nunc demum intelligo,  
utilia mihi quam fuerint quae despexeram,  
et quae laudaram quantum luctus habuerint.

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<sup>50</sup> Phaedrus 1.12 = Perry 74.



This story is proof that the things you despise often turn out to be more useful than the things you prize. A stag had come to a spring to drink and standing there he saw his image in the water. As he admired and praised his branching horns and abused the excessive thinness of his legs, he was suddenly terrified by the voices of hunters. The stag began to flee across the field, and swiftly eluded the dogs. But when the beast entered the forest, his horns became entangled and the dogs began to maul him with their savage teeth. As he was dying, the stag is said to have pronounced this speech: "Oh woe is me, now at last I understand [*nunc demum intelligo*]: the things which I despised were useful, and what a grief there was from the things that I praised!"

The grotesque spectacle of an animal pronouncing the story's "last words" as he is being mauled to death is typical of the Aesopic fable. These masochistic moments might violate the sentimental and dramatic conventions of many other genres, but it is in perfect accord with the Aesopic model of *quae nocent, docent*. The focus is all on the stag; even though dogs and hunters arrive on the scene, the only character who counts is the stag. The stag plays both roles in the plot: as "M" he admires his horns in the water and as "R" he laments his horns entrapping him in the brush, a prey to the hunter and his dogs.

Thus, it is possible for an animal to castigate himself in an "M=R" fable, condensing the agonistic structure of an "M-versus-R" fable into a single, dramatic denouement involving only one character. In addition, it is also possible to expand the structure so that another character is introduced after the denouement of the plot, with the sole purpose of mocking and abusing the mistake that has been made.<sup>51</sup> This interloper

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<sup>51</sup> Likewise in the Buddhist jataka tale tradition, the Buddha is frequently incarnated as a bystander to the events: as a tree spirit, a chance passer-by, etc. In the Makasa-jataka (in Cowell I.116-117), the "mosquito jataka," for example, a carpenter asks his son to swat a mosquito that has landed on his head; the boy takes an axe and splits his father's head in two. The story explains that "at that very time the Bodhisatta had reached that village in the way of trade, and was sitting in the carpenter's shop." Nojgaard devotes some attention to the phenomenon of the Aesopic "interloper", which he refers to as the *survenant* (1964).

is not exactly a participant in the plot and thus is relatively unconnected to the fable's narrative functions: not "M," not "R." Rather than being part of the plot, the interloper serves to voice the moral of the story. Consider, for example, this variation on the story of "the fox and the goat in the well"<sup>52</sup> in which the goat is replaced by a rabbit and the role of the fox is reduced to that of a typical interloper:<sup>53</sup>

Lagôos tis edipsa kai en phreati katêlthe tou hudôr piein, aph' hou kai hêdeôs polu epepôkei. hote de ekeithen anelthein emellen amêkhaniai suneskhethê peri tên anodon, kai ta megista êthumei. alôpêx de elthousa ka'keise touton heurousa ephê pros auton "megalôs ontôs esphalês: proteron gar ôpheiles bouleusasthai pôs estai soi tou phreatos anelthein, eith' houtôs en autôi katelthein."

A rabbit was thirsty and got down in a well to take a drink of water. He enjoyed a good drink, but when he was ready to get out, he found himself unable to get back up and was in great desperation. When a fox came along and found him there, he said, "You made a great mistake [*megalôs ontôs esphalês*]. You ought to have decided first how you were going to get out before you decided to go down into the well."

In this case, the fox's role in the story is quite different from what we saw in the story of "the fox and the goat in the well." Here the rabbit has gotten into the well all by himself, and he could even pronounce the moral by himself ("M=R"): "Oh, what a fool I was, to get down in this well without knowing how to get out again." The arrival of the fox-interloper serves only to increase the sharpness of the insult, turning the rabbit's foolishness into a more public humiliation. At the same time, the interloper is not essential to the story and can easily be dispensed with. In the story of "the fox and the

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<sup>52</sup> Perry 9, cited on p. 9.

<sup>53</sup> Perry 408 (from Syntipas 10). Despite the differences in the characters and the plots of the stories, Rodriguez-Adrados assigns both this story and the story of "the fox and the goat in the well" (Perry 9) to the same fable number, H-9.

goat in the well," the fox was "R" to the goat's "M," but in the story of "the rabbit in the well," the fox is an interloper who is not involved in the plot.

We can compare the presence or absence of an interloper in the same story by looking at two different versions of "the jackdaw who imitated an eagle": in one version the jackdaw denounces his own stupidity, but in another version there is an interloper who pronounces the denunciation. Babrius tells the version of the story in which the jackdaw denounces himself:<sup>54</sup>

Onuxin aras arna liparon ek poimnês  
ênegke paisin deipnon aietos dôsein:  
to d' auto praxein kai koloios hôrmêthê.  
kai dê kataptas arnos eskhethê nôtois

\* \* \*

"dikên d' anoiês" eipen "axiôs tinô:  
ti gar ôn koloios aietous emimoumên;"

An eagle with his talons lifted a sleek lamb from the flock and carried it off to give to his young ones for a meal. A jackdaw started to do the same thing. He swooped down and fastened on the back of a lamb [but he was unable to lift the lamb and his claws became entangled in the fleece so that he could not escape. Some boys came by, captured and tormented him.] "It is right [*axiôs*] that I pay the penalty for my folly [*anoiês*]," he said. "Why did I, who am only a jackdaw, try to imitate the eagles?"

In the Greek prose version, on the other hand, the external events of the plot remain the same but the distribution of the speaking roles has been changed, so that it is now an interloper who has the "last word," denouncing the bird's foolish mistake:<sup>55</sup>

Aetos kataptas apo tinos hupsêlês petras arna hêprase: koloios de touton

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<sup>54</sup> Babrius 137 = Perry 2. Unfortunately, text of Babrius's version of the fable is damaged, and only the first four lines and the last two lines have been preserved.

<sup>55</sup> Perry 2.

theasamenos dia zêlon [touton] mimêsasthai êthelêse. kai dê katheis heauton meta pollou rhoizou epi krion ênekhthê. emparentôn d' autôi tôn onukhôn tois mallois, exarthênai mê dunamenos epterusseto, heôs ho poimên, to gegonos aisthomenos, prosdramôn sunelaben auton kai perikopsas autou ta oxuptera, hôs espera katelabe, tois heautou paisin ekomise. tôn de punthanomenôn ti eiê to orneon, ephê "hôs men egô saphôs oida, kolois, hôs de autos bouletai, aetos."

An eagle flew down from a high crag and carried off a lamb. A jackdaw saw him and was eager to follow his example; so he descended with a great flurry and lit on a ram. When he got his claws fastened in the wool and couldn't fly off, he fluttered there until the shepherd, seeing what had happened, ran up and caught him. The shepherd clipped his wing feathers and, when evening came, took him home to his children. When the children asked what kind of bird this was, the shepherd said, "I know perfectly well [*egô saphôs oida*] he's a jackdaw, but he thinks he's an eagle."

In both cases, the fable has an "M=R" structure: the jackdaw's actions bring about his own punishment. There is no "contest of strength" or "contest of wits" between the jackdaw and any other character. The bird is his own worst enemy and has no one but himself to blame; he does not need the shepherd's help to provoke his own catastrophe. The shepherd-interloper enters into the story only in order to make the bird's humiliation a more public object of ridicule.

### ***Mistakes Averted ("R-not-M") and Fables of Revenge***

Although the Aesopic fable is oriented towards negative exempla based on public ridicule and humiliation, there is also a structural space for a more positive exemplum based on the story of a mistake that is prevented or avoided. In this positive variation, the potential "M" character emerges as "R," stopping himself in the nick of time from making a terrible error -- like the wise goat on the mountainside, for example, who

rejected the invitations of the wolf and the lion to come down onto the plain.<sup>56</sup> Unlike the negative "M-versus-R" and "M=R" fables, this "R-not-M" type of fable focuses on a mistake that is corrected before the catastrophic *eventus* occurs. With the "R-not-M" model in mind, we can better appreciate the bizarre and oddly abrupt plot of a fable like Phaedrus's story of "the pregnant woman who chooses to give birth on the floor:"<sup>57</sup>

Nemo libenter recolit qui laesit locum.  
Instante partu mulier actis mensibus  
humi iacebat flebilis gemitus ciens.  
vir est hortatus corpus lecto reciperet,  
onus naturae melius quo deponeret.  
Minime, inquit, illo posse confido loco  
malum finiri quo conceptum est initium.

No one gladly revisits a place which did him harm. After her months of pregnancy had passed, a woman about to deliver her child was lying on the ground, moaning and weeping. Her husband urged her to rest her body on the bed, so that she might better relieve herself of nature's burden. But she said: "I scarcely trust that my trouble could come to an end in the very place where it was first conceived."

This woman rejects the potential mistake of getting back into bed: according to the rhetorical logic of this fable, it would be foolish for her to expect relief in the place where her troubles began. Such an example shows that while the Aesopic fable is a didactic genre, it does not aim to teach practical knowledge: the didactic message of the Aesopic fable must be understood metaphorically. If this were a story about the real world in a literal sense -- if it were really about pregnant women and childbirth -- the fable would be giving very poor advice: women do not give birth to children lying down

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<sup>56</sup> Perry 157, cited on p. 12.

<sup>57</sup> Phaedrus 1.18 = Perry 479.

on the floor but really do get into bed, or sit down on a birthing chair, etc.<sup>38</sup> Instead of being read literally, however, the fable must be applied metaphorically. The fable has a semiotic function, serving as a sign for some other situation, an exemplum to be applied in various circumstances. In this case, the example of "the pregnant woman" can be applied to any person who might be planning to revisit a place where something bad has happened in the past -- e.g., don't go back to that restaurant where you got food poisoning, don't take that short cut where you got lost once before, don't take your car back to the inept mechanic, and so on. In terms of its plot structure, the character of the pregnant woman is acting out both functions of the plot, "R" and "M." Perhaps even more importantly, this fable exposes one of the most marked stylistic devices of the Aesopic fable: absurdity. What the pregnant woman says is absurd but, when applied metaphorically -- "no one gladly revisits a place which did him harm" -- the story makes good sense. This incongruity makes the story of the pregnant woman delightfully ironic, and therefore much more humorous than the "R-not-M" story of the goat refusing to join the wolf in the plain. There is a verbal ingenuity in the woman's reasoning which is lacking in the goat's riposte to the wolf; the moral of the story, joined with the image of the pregnant woman, makes a memorable *bon mot*, very much in the Aesopic spirit of wit and brevity.

A more complicated sort of "positive" exemplum occurs in the Aesopic fables of revenge, where the functions of "M" and "R" are doubled and reversed: "M1" is

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<sup>38</sup> On the birth of children in the ancient world and the position of the woman in labor, see Bettini's *Nascere* (1998: 79-83, with additional bibliography cited there).

corrected and punished by "R1," but in the second phase of the story, "R1" is recast as "M2" (the trickster tricked) while the "M1" character (or that character's avenger) emerges as "R2." A famous example of this double plot is the story of "the fox and the stork." This fable again depends on the bird's long beak, which provided the basis for the story of "the wolf and the crane."<sup>59</sup> In this case, however, the bird's long beak becomes the means not only of her punishment but also of her revenge.<sup>60</sup>

Nulli nocendum; si quis vero laeserit,  
multandum simili iure fabella admonet.  
Ad cenam vulpes dicitur ciconiam  
prior invitasse, et liquidam in patulo marmore  
posuisse sorbitionem, quam nullo modo  
gustare esuriens potuerit ciconia.  
quae vulpem cum revocasset, intrito cibo  
plenam lagonam posuit; huic rostrum inserens  
satiatur ipsa et torquet convivam fame.  
quae cum lagonae collum frustra lamberet,  
peregrinam sic locutam volucrem accipimus:  
Sua quique exempla debet aequo animo pati.

Do no harm, but if someone indeed should injure another, then he ought to be punished likewise, as this fable advises. A fox is said to have originally invited a stork to dinner, where he put before her a liquid broth on a marble platter, which the hungry stork could not consume no matter how she tried. She in turn invited the fox to dinner, where she put before her a bottle filled with solid food; she ate her fill by inserting her beak in the bottle and tormented her dinner partner with hunger. As the fox in vain was licking the neck of the bottle, the migratory bird (or so we have heard) told the fox: "You should suffer with equanimity when treated according to your own example [*sua quique exempla debet aequo animo pati*]."

In the first phase of this story, the stork (M1) expects a nice dinner with her friend the fox. That is, she makes a mistake that is quite similar to the mistake made by the crane:

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<sup>59</sup> Phaedrus 1.8 = Perry 156, cited on p. 23.

<sup>60</sup> Phaedrus 1.26 = Perry 426.

it is not a particularly good idea to expect any benefits from predators like foxes (or wolves). Sure enough, the fox's cruel trickery corrects and punishes the stork's mistake: the physical catastrophe takes the form of the stork going without her dinner. In the second phase of the plot, however, the fox makes a foolish mistake of her own: she expects that the stork will still provide her with a fine dinner, despite the events of the day before. The fox is now "M2," while the stork has learned from her mistake and is now "R2": she engineers both a physical catastrophe in which the fox has nothing to eat, as well as a verbal catastrophe in which the fox is mockingly rebuked. The fox, originally a would-be "R," is reduced to the status of an "M," as in other stories of "the trickster tricked" (like the story of "the fox and the locust"<sup>61</sup>). This doubled plot is not simply an elegant variation on the structural possibilities of the fable, but a dramatization of its didactic principle: the stork is a bird who learns from her mistake, while the fox is unable to learn from the lessons of her own life (*sua exempla*) in order to avoid the ever-present dangers of failure and humiliation.

Thus, while the Aesopic fable has only two required functions, "M" and "R," this simple structure is able to generate an impressive range of stories. Yet there is a lingering problem in the very structure of the fable itself, in these categories of "M" and "R": sometimes the "R" character is practically "right" but morally "wrong," as we have already seen in several stories. The kite who eats all the doves, the fox who tricks the goat into coming down into the well, the wolf who refuses to pay the crane for her services: these are examples of "R" characters who are wicked, deceitful, and dangerous.

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<sup>61</sup> Perry 241, cited on p. 14.



This moral ambiguity inherent in the Aesopic tradition was very troubling to the Roman poet Phaedrus and later on provoked a veritable crisis for the writers of Aesopic fables in the Christian Middle Ages, as we will see in Chapters 3-5.

## **Part Two. Animal Cliches in Aesop's Fables**

Ancient Greek and Roman culture abounded in conventional animal motifs and cliches which served as the "raw material" not only for Aesopic fables but also for scientific and natural history writers, for proverbs and other popular forms of expression, and for the visual arts and all sorts of other communicative media. Some of these cliches are still familiar to us, such as the "swan song" and the "sly fox," while others have become displaced from our cultural imagination (for example, we no longer think of bees as quintessentially pure animals ruled by a benevolent "king bee"<sup>62</sup>). Yet while this body of cliches formed a fairly stable body of knowledge in antiquity, the actual use of these animal cliches varied from genre to genre, based on the constraints imposed by that genre. The way in which the generic plot structure of the Aesopic fable transforms these traditional cliches into new and unexpected formations provides further evidence for the determining role of the plot in the construction of the fables.

### ***Adapting Animal Sollertia into an Aesopic Fable***

One major division of animal lore in antiquity can be subsumed under the rubric

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<sup>62</sup> On bees in antiquity, see Part III of Bettini's *Anthropology and Roman Culture* (1991).

of *sollertia* -- the wisdom of animals, their tricks and their intelligence. Despite the strong tendency in the Greek (and Roman) philosophical tradition to characterize the animals as "dumb beasts," *aloga zôia*, there was a huge body of popular anecdotal evidence attesting to the cleverness of animals: animals might be denied formal powers of rational thought (*logos*) and they might lack the ability to express themselves in language (*logos* again), but they were nevertheless credited with many astounding feats of intelligence, as recorded in natural history writers such as Pliny and Aelian, or introduced as examples in symposiastic writers such as Athenaeus or Plutarch.<sup>63</sup> Aesopic fables, however, are not interested in animal intelligence, but animal stupidity; the fable is a genre of *stultitia* rather than *sollertia*. As a result, these traditional stories of animal intelligence must be transformed into stories of foolishness in the Aesopic tradition, inverting the motifs and orienting them in the direction of a different, more Aesopic plot.

One common motif of animal *sollertia* is the thirsty crow who drops pebbles in a jar to raise the water level. The simplest account is the one reported in Pliny:<sup>64</sup>

tradendum putavere memoriae quidam visum per sitim lapides congerentem in situlam monimenti in qua pluvia aqua duraret sed quae attingi non posset; ita descendere paventem expressisse tali congerie quantum poturo sufficeret.

Certain persons thought it worth recording that [the crow] has been seen during a time of thirst to heap up stones in the urn of a monument in which some

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<sup>63</sup> On this topic, see in particular Sorabji's *Animal Minds and Human Morals* (1993), and the bibliography cited there.

<sup>64</sup> Pliny 10.125. For the medieval Latin tradition following Pliny, compare Thomas Cantimprensis 5.31: *De corvis quoque compertum est, ut si aquam in aliquo profundo loco reperrissent, ubi colli brevitae obstante pertingere minime potuissent, ilico aggregare lapillos in aqua, quousque adeo ascendat aqua, ut eam rostro possit attingere et concupito latice satiari.*

rainwater remained but which was out of reach; thus although it was afraid to go down into the urn, the bird was able to raise the water level by piling up the rocks so that it was able to drink.

Pliny's account is almost a "degree-zero" version of the anecdote, expressed in extremely neutral terms, something that might be called factual: this is what one bird did at one time. Pliny does not generalize about crows in general, he does not make the bird's behavior into an explicitly positive exemplum for humans to imitate, and he does not speculate about the divine or supernatural aspects of this animal's intelligence.

Plutarch and Aelian, on the other hand, each proceed to amplify and explore other cultural possibilities lurking in this commonplace story of the crow's clever behavior. When Plutarch includes this anecdote in his *de sollertia animalium*, he attributes the behavior not just to one crow on one particular occasion; instead, he claims that this behavior is characteristic of crows in general -- and even more specifically that it is typical of crows who live in Libya:<sup>65</sup>

allôs d' an edokei muthos, hôsper hêmin edokei to tôn en Libuêi korakôn, hoi potou deomenoi lithous emballousin anaplêrountes kai anagontes to hudôr, mekhri an en ephiktôi genêtai.

Otherwise it would seem only a story [*muthos*], as I formerly regarded the story of the Libyan crows which, when they are thirsty, throw stones into a pot to fill it and raise the water until it is within their reach.

Plutarch's "Libyan" crows reflect the stereotypical belief that animals from exotic

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<sup>65</sup> Plutarch *Moralia* 967A = *De sollertia animalium* 10. Plutarch goes on to describe the behavior of a dog who dropped pebbles into a half empty jar of oil to raise the level of the oil. For yet another animal as the protagonist of this same basic story, and yet another fluid, consider an example from the Babylonian Talmud reported in Schwarzbaum (1979: 443): a snake poured water into a flask containing some wine at the bottom; by pouring water into the bottle it caused the wine to rise to the top.

locations are endowed with exotic attributes. When Plutarch shifts the anecdote of the crow's behavior to the landscape of Libya he has added a new and "marvelous" dimension to the unadorned version of the story found in Pliny. Libya, in fact, was a regular locale for animal marvels. Aelian also tells stories about the exotic attributes of Libyan animals, which often heighten or invert the animal's normal behavior: for example, there is said to be a lake of boiling water in Libya filled with fish that die if placed in cold water;<sup>66</sup> the cattle of Libya have horns in front of their eyes which block their vision so they have to walk backwards, while the goats of Libya have their udders attached to their chests.<sup>67</sup> Of course, exotic lands not only breed exotic animals -- they breed exotic peoples as well, and stories of animal *mirabilia* often overlap with fantastic ethnography. Libya, for example, is the home of the Psylli, a tribe of people immune to the poison of any creature and who therefore test the legitimacy of their offspring by exposing them to poisonous snakes.<sup>68</sup> These exotic animals and exotic humans can even serve as mirrors for one another: Aelian, for example, states that the people of Libya are slender and dirty, and so are their horses, just as the Persians are proud and delicate, and so too their horses.<sup>69</sup>

Given his interest in such geographic exotica, it is thus not surprising to find that Aelian recounts the "Libyan" version of the crow's wise way of raising the water level

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<sup>66</sup> Aelian 14.19.

<sup>67</sup> Aelian 16.33.

<sup>68</sup> Aelian 16.27-28 and 1.57.

<sup>69</sup> For an entire paragraph of such parallels, see Aelian 3.2.

in a jar.<sup>70</sup>

Libues de korakes, hotan hoi anthrôpoi phobôi dipsous hudreusamenoi plêrôsôsi ta aggeia hudatôs, kai kata tôn tegôn thentes easôsi tôi aeri to hudôr phulattein asêpton, entautha, es hoson men autois ta rhamphê kateisin egkuptontes, khrôntai tôi potôi: hotan de hupolêxêi, psêphous komizousi kai tôi stomati kai tois onuxi, kai emballousin es ton keramon: kai hai men ek tou barous ôthountai kai huphizanousi, to ge mên hudôr thlibomenon anaplei. kai pinousin eu mala eumêkhanôs hoi korakes, eidotes phusei tini aporrêtôi duo sômata mian khôran mê dekhesthai.

But the ravens of Libya, when men through fear of thirst draw water and fill their vessels and place them on the roof so that the fresh air may keep the water from putrefying, the ravens, I say, help themselves to drink by bending over and inserting their beaks as far as they will go. And when the water gets too low they gather pebbles in their mouth and claws and drop them into the earthenware vessel. Now the pebbles are borne down by their weight and sink, while the water owing to their pressure rises. So the ravens by a most ingenious contrivance get their drink; they know by some mysterious instinct [*phusei tini aporrêtôi*] that one space will not contain two bodies.

As often in his animal stories, Aelian attributes this anecdote to a divine and mysterious power possessed by the birds; even if they are lacking in reason (that is, even though they are *alogos zôia*), these Libyan crows are still possessed of an incredible natural power, *phusis aporrêtos*.

Turning to the Aesopic version of this same anecdote, however, we will find that there is nothing marvelous or mysterious about the crow's behavior: instead, the cliché of the "thirsty crow filling a jar with pebbles" is transformed, very deftly, into the Aesopic story of a mistake. Moreover, the exotic geographical detail of "Libya" completely disappears; the Aesopic genre has no particular interest in the mysterious landscapes in which so many of the natural history anecdotes about animals are located.

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<sup>70</sup> Aelian 2.48

Avianus's crows is just your average, everyday crow, not exotic or mysterious in any way.<sup>71</sup>

Ingentem sitiens cornix adspexerat urnam,  
quae minimam fundo continuisset aquam.  
hanc enisa diu planis effundere campis,  
scilicet ut nimiam pelleret inde sitim,  
postquam nulla viam virtus dedit, admovet omnes  
indignata nova calliditate dolos;  
nam brevis immersis accrescens sponte lapillis  
potandi facilem praebuit unda viam.  
viribus haec docuit quam sit prudentia maior,  
qua coeptum cornix explicuisset opus.

A thirsty crow noticed a huge jar which had a little bit of water at the very bottom. For a long time the crow tried to pour the water out on the level plain, in order to dispel her tremendous thirst, of course. But when her fortitude was not able to find a way [*postquam nulla viam virtus dedit*], she grew angry and applied all her wiles with a new trickiness [*nova calliditate*]. By sinking little rocks in the water she was able to raise the level of the water enough so that of its own accord it offered her an easy way to drink. This fable teaches that prudence is greater than force, in that prudence allowed the crow's first efforts to unfold to their conclusion.

Instead of a marvelous story of animal instinct, Avianus makes the cliché into the story of a mistake: as the story begins, this Aesopic crow tries one (foolish) solution to the problem, struggling to overturn the jar by force. It is only after this first mistaken attempt that the bird finds the conventional solution of dropping pebbles into the jar. Thus the fable becomes a positive exemplum according to the "R-not-M" model in which the protagonist corrects her own mistake, with a plot that unfolds in two distinct stages: first the crow tries to use force (*postquam nulla viam virtus dedit*) but she cannot succeed until she learns to use her wits instead (*calliditate*). It is this two-fold movement of the

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<sup>71</sup> Avianus 27 = Perry 390.

plot which demonstrates the moral that forethought is superior to strength. By making the bird learn from her own mistake, Avianus has converted the *sollertia* anecdote into a true and proper Aesopic fable, the story of a mistake -- in this case, the story of a mistake corrected.

Avianus is the earliest testimony for this Aesopic fable about the thirsty crow who drops stones into the jar. Moreover, it seems likely that Avianus borrowed the motif from the natural history writers, given that the bird in his Aesopic fable does not speak. As a general rule, the animal protagonists of Aesopic fables are inclined to speak, usually pronouncing the moralizing "last words" of the story as we have seen in so many examples already. Avianus, however, supplies us with no "last words" spoken by a character in the story; instead, the author himself adds the moral, while the bird is silent -- just as the bird is, perforce, silent in the versions of this story recounted by the natural history writers Pliny, Aelian and Plutarch. The silence of the crow strongly suggests that Avianus has rather self-consciously crafted this story on the model provided by the natural history writers and that in the process of this adaptation he failed to fully "Aesopify" the natural history version of the bird; that is, he failed to give her the gift of speech, which is made possible by the rules of the Aesopic genre, but which is precluded by the assumptions of natural history writing. In order to fully "Aesopify" the anecdote, it would be possible to go one step farther, allowing the crow to pronounce the moral of the story in her own words: "Oh, what a fool I was," she might say, "to think that I could win my goal by force when instead it was wit that was required."

In Avianus's version of the "thirsty crow" anecdote, the conventional animal motif

is turned into a true and proper Aesop plot: the story of a mistake. The *sollertia* of the animal (in this case, the crow) is not enough by itself to make an Aesopic fable because an Aesopic plot requires the presence of a mistake, an error; the *sollertia* must be opposed to its lack, to some moment of stupidity. Avianus rises to the occasion and cleverly transforms the crow's *sollertia* into a fully functioning Aesopic fable. Phaedrus (who in general displays less obedience to the traditional "Aesopic" forms than either Avianus or Babrius, as we will see in Chapter 3) includes a similar anecdote of animal *sollertia* in his collection: the story of the bear hunting for crabs. In this case, however, Phaedrus has not actually turned the anecdote of *sollertia* into a true Aesopic plot, and this results in a kind of gap between the plot of the story and the moral which is appended to it:<sup>72</sup>

Si quando in silvis urso desunt copiae,  
 scopulosum ad litus currit et prendens petram  
 pilosa crura sensim demittit vado;  
 quorum inter villos haeserunt cancri simul,  
 in terram adsiliens excutit praedam maris,  
 escaque fruitur passim collecta vafer.  
 Ergo etiam stultis acuit ingenium fames.

When the bear runs out of food in the woods, he comes running to the rocky shore and grabbing hold of a rock he slowly lowers his hairy legs into the stream; then as soon as some crabs have clung to the shaggy fur, he jumps back onto land and shakes off the booty from the sea, and the clever creature [*vafer*] enjoys the food he has gathered from all around. So it is therefore that hunger sharpens the wit [*ingenium*] even of fools [*stultis*].

Despite serious deficiencies in the plot of this fable, Phaedrus is nevertheless an expert

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<sup>72</sup> Phaedrus Appendix 20 = Perry 550. There are not any extant accounts of the bear hunting for crabs in this way in the natural history writers. Aristotle (HA 594B) mentions that bears eat crabs but does not describe how they hunt for them.



in the vocabulary of Aesopic rhetoric. He knows that an Aesopic fable is supposed to be about the dangers of stupidity, so he attempts to use this anecdote about the clever (*vafer*) bear<sup>73</sup> and his hunt for the crabs to demonstrate that even stupid creatures (*stultis*) can discover their own intelligence when driven by hunger. The Aesopic motif of stupidity, *stultitia*, has crept into the story's conclusion without any foundation in the actual plot of the fable. The story of the bear has not offered any evidence of stupidity, because the bear has not made a mistake. He simply ran out of food in the forest and wisely came to seek his food in the water instead. Phaedrus knows how an Aesopic moral is supposed to sound, but he has not altered the plot of this conventional animal anecdote in order to make it an actual demonstration of that moral. Of course, it would be easy to imagine such behavior: the Aesopic fable is a genre of pure fiction, with full license given to the imagination. So the bear might sit starving in the woods, stupidly waiting for the berries on a bush to ripen, until a wiser animal, such as a fox, comes by and instructs him in a more productive strategy for finding food.<sup>74</sup>

In his story of the bear, however, Phaedrus has not made any effort to adjust the narrative of this natural history motif to fit the plot requirements of the Aesopic fable: the moral of Phaedrus's poem is about a fool, as an Aesopic moral should be, but the

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<sup>73</sup> For *vafer* elsewhere in Phaedrus, consider 2.6 (= Perry 490), the story of the crow who tricks the eagle with *vafris monitis*. It is not clear that the bear, however, was regarded as especially clever. Pliny (*Natural History* 8.54) makes a curious comment about the bear, which suggests that it was regarded as a creature of "all brawn and no brains" as we might say in English: *tauros ex ore cornibusque eorum omnibus pedibus suspensi pondere fatigant; nec alteri animalium in maleficio stultia sollertior*.

<sup>74</sup> For a story along these lines, see the jackdaw waiting for the figs to ripen in Perry 126, cited on p. 73.

story of the fool and his mistake is missing from the plot of Phaedrus's poem. When Avianus's crow failed in her effort to overturn the jar by force, she had to discover an intelligent way to proceed -- but Phaedrus's bear does not invent anything new in the course of the plot; there is no moment of didactic discovery which is a hallmark of the Aesopic genre. This moment of didactic discovery is what distinguishes Aesopic fables from the usual accounts of animal *sollertia* in the natural history writers. Plutarch and Aelian have no reason to call attention to the animals' stupidity; indeed, they are often writing against the stereotype of brute beasts, *aloga zôia*, expounded in the ancient philosophical tradition. According to the *sollertia* model, the animal mysteriously, spontaneously, naturally knows what to do. Even though a bear does not have the rational intelligence required to invent tools like fishing rods and nets, he nevertheless manages to use his body, his natural endowment, in order to accomplish the task at hand. The Aesopic fable, on the other hand, is about negative exempla, colored with tones of abuse and scorn, not wonder and awe: even when the Aesopic fable offers a positive exemplum, as in Avianus's version of the thirsty crow, that positive outcome is made possible only by the prevention or detection of a potential mistake.

Yet even if traditional anecdotes of animal *sollertia* are not sufficient by themselves to constitute a true and proper Aesopic plot, these motifs can frequently provide the "raw material" on which to build the plot of a mistake. Thus, while Phaedrus does a rather poor job with the bear who goes fishing, the Aesopic corpus contains a fine example of a story based on the fox's ingenious fishing technique. For

a "natural history" version of the fox's story, we can turn again to Aelian:<sup>75</sup>

ta smikra de ikhthudia thêrôsi panu sophôs. para tên okhthên tên tou potamou erkhontai kai tên ouran kathiasin es to hudôr: ta de prosneonta eniskhetai te kai empalassetai tôi dasei tôi tôn trikhôn. hai de aisthomenai tou men hudatos anakhôrousin, elthousai de es ta xêra khôria diaseiousi tas ouras, kai ekpiptei ta ikhthudia, kai ekeinai deipnon habrotaton ekhousin.

Their manner of catching very small fishes is extremely wise [*panu sophôs*]. They move along the banks of a stream and trail their tails in the water. And the fish swim up and are immeshed and entangled in the thick hairs. When the foxes notice this, they withdraw from the water and go to dry ground where they shake their tails thoroughly: the little fishes tumble out, and the foxes make a delicious meal.

In and of itself, this anecdote is not Aesopic: like Phaedrus's story of the bear and the crabs, the fox who goes fishing is acting in an "extremely wise way," without any element of a mistake. How then to make this motif into an Aesopic fable? One possibility would be to follow Avianus's strategy: the fox could hit upon this solution after some failed attempts at fishing with her teeth or paws. Another alternative would be to make the fox into an "R" character, correcting the foolish mistake made by the fish, who perhaps stupidly think that her tail is a nice clump of water weeds in which to hide from predators. And there is yet another possibility: while the fox is talented at hunting in this fashion, some other animal might make the same attempt and fail miserably. This is precisely what happens in an Aesopic fable about the fox and the wolf which is told by Odo of Cheriton:<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Aelian 6.24

<sup>76</sup> Odo 74 = Perry 625. For a general discussion of Odo's fables, see Chapter 4. When told of the bear rather than a fox, this story can be an aetiology for why the bear lacks a tail. *Uncle Remus* (Harris, 1986: 25) explains that this is why rabbits don't have tails: "Are they all that way just because the old Rabbit lost his tail in the creek?" asked

Lupus obvians Vulpi ait: Compater, unde venis? Et ait Vulpes: De quodam vivario, ubi pisces optimos cepi et sufficienter comedi. Quesivit Lupus: Quomodo cepisti? Ait Vulpes: Caudam in aquam posui, et diu tenui, et pisces credentes quod esset aliquid comestibile, vel quod essem mortua,<sup>77</sup> caude adheserunt, et traxi eos ad terram et comedi. Et ait Lupus: Numquid sic ego pisces capere possum? Ait Vulpes: Optime poteris, cum sis forcior quam ego. Perrexit ergo Lupus festinanter ad vivarium, et caudam in aquam posuit et diu tenuit, donec esset congelata, gelu enim faciebat. Post longam moram voluit caudam extrahere, credens quod multitudo piscium ei adhereret; sed non potuit propter gelicidium quod caudam tenuit. Detentus est ibi usque mane. Et venerunt homines et Lupum fere usque ad mortem fustigaverunt. Et cum vix evasisset, maledixit compatri suo, qui pisces sibi promisit et verbera et vulnera et fere mortem persolvit.

The wolf met the fox and asked, "Where have you been, my friend?" And the fox said: "I'm on my way back from the fishpond, where I've caught some excellent fish and had plenty to eat. I lowered my tail into the water and held it there a long time, and the fish, thinking either that it was something to eat or that I was dead, got stuck in my tail and I dragged them up onto the land and ate them." And the wolf asked: "Do you think I could catch fish that way?" The fox said: "Of course you could! Especially since you are stronger than I am." He then quickly led the wolf to the fishpond and he placed his tail in the water and held it there a long time until it froze, given that the weather was turning frosty. After a long wait the wolf wanted to extract his tail, thinking that a whole school of fish must be stuck to it, but he couldn't get his tail out because of all the ice that had frozen to it. He was stuck that way all night until the next day. Then men came and beat the wolf within an inch of his life. And when he just barely managed to escape, he cursed his friend, who had promised him fishes, but had paid with whippings and wounds and almost with death.

In this case, the conventional motif of the fox fishing with his tail has been inserted into an "M-versus-R" type of Aesopic fable, in which the fox is "R" and the wolf is "M."

As the "R" character, the fox must have some kind of knowledge which gives him a

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the little boy. "Dat's it, honey," replied the old man. "Dat's w'at dey tells me. Look like dey er bleedzd ter take atter der pa."

<sup>77</sup> The motif of the fox playing dead appears in the *Physiologus*, and thus makes its way into the medieval collections of animal lore and also into medieval Aesopica. In the Latin versions of the *Physiologus*, the fox can be found in Carmody Y-18 and Carmody B-15.

vantage point from which to manipulate the wolf's propensity to foolishness. The motif of the "tail-fisher" is simply a device to advance the action of the story; the plot itself unfolds as the fox's *sollertia* is deformed into the wolf's foolish mistake, the misapplication of an otherwise sound technique to the waters of a freezing river. The misapplication of a concept is typical of the "Fool" in all his folkloristic manifestations, not only in the simple plot of an Aesopic fable.<sup>78</sup> Starting from the motifs of the eagle snatching a sheep or the fox catching fish with his tail, the Aesopic fable is able to produce quite different sorts of stories: the story of the foolish jackdaw imitating the eagle,<sup>79</sup> or the story of the foolish wolf imitating the fox who goes fishing. The natural history writers invite us to learn from the animal's wisdom, but Aesop, as usual, follows the opposite path, asking us to learn from the animals' foolish mistakes instead.

### ***Making Mirabilia into Aesopic Fables***

In order to take a cliché of animal intelligence and make it into an Aesopic fable, the animal's *sollertia* must be diverted in order to yield a mistake or a potential mistake. Thus, while there is obviously a fundamental difference between the positive exempla of animal *sollertia* in a writer like Aelian and the largely negative exempla of the Aesopic fable, there is still a kind of kinship between these stories: they are all about intelligence -- either its presence, or its lack. In the case of stories about animal *mirabilia*, the

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<sup>78</sup> For a discussion, see Bettini's analysis in "Bruto lo sciocco" (1987).

<sup>79</sup> Perry 2, cited on p. 31.

situation is somewhat different. Aelian's accounts of animal *mirabilia*, for example, are often marked by the phrase "some mysterious instinct;" Aelian is so committed to the marvelous dimension of the animal world that he even uses this vocabulary of the "mysterious instinct" in conjunction with traditional stories of animal *sollertia*, as in the story of the thirsty crow putting stones in the jar. By appealing to the mysterious dimension of nature, Aelian orients the animal stories towards an ineffable, divine, otherworldly plane, a fundamentally different reality than that experienced by human beings. In Aesop, however, there is no trace of this otherworldly dimension. Very little of the immense body of ancient animal *mirabilia* -- the phoenix, the unicorn, sirens and centaurs, and other fantastic hybrids, exotic creatures of Libya and India, etc. -- made its way into the Aesopic corpus. Nevertheless, there are some Aesopic fables which take these motifs of animal *mirabilia* and turn them into the "story of a mistake." The fact that the Aesopic fable can take these otherwise improbable motifs and turn them into fables provides further evidence for the powerfully creative cultural force that this genre was able to exert over whatever sort of animal lore with which it came into contact: even when the Aesopic genre is itself basically hostile to the marvelous and the supernatural, it is nevertheless able to absorb these marvelous motifs and turn them into conventional Aesopic plots.

In ancient Greek and Roman culture, the swan was supposed to mysteriously anticipate the moment of its death and to burst into a marvelous song immediately before dying. Socrates refers to this as the swan's *mantikê*, its divinatory power; Cicero also

refers to the *divinatio* of the swans.<sup>80</sup> Aelian naturally makes several references to this phenomenon, using it as evidence for his unwavering conviction that animals possess natural advantages that render them superior to human beings:<sup>81</sup>

pepisteutai de hupo tôn anô tou khronou hoti to kukneion houtô kaloumenon aisas eita apothnêskei. timai de ara auton hê phusis kai tôn kalôn kai agathôn anthrôpôn mallon, kai eikotôs: ei ge toutous men kai epainousi kai thrênousin alloi, ekeinoi de eite touto ethelois eite ekeino, heautois nemousin. [...] pleon ekhei tôn anthrôpôn ho kuknos en tois megistois: oide te gar hopote tou biou to terma aphikneitai autôi, kai mentoi kai euthumôs pherein auto prosion hupo tên phuseôs lakhôn ekhei dôron to kalliston.

The ancients believed that when the swan has sung what is called its swan-song [*kukneion*], it dies. In that case Nature honors it more highly than it does noble and upright men, and rightly so, for while others praise and lament those men, the swans praise, or, if you will, lament themselves. [...] The swan has this advantage over men in matters of the greatest moment, for it knows when the end of its life is at hand and, what is more, in bearing its approach with cheerfulness, it has received from Nature the noblest of gifts.

Pliny takes a skeptical attitude towards this ancient belief, based on his own "experiments:" *olorum morte narratur flebilis cantus, falso, ut arbitror aliquot experimentis*; "it is said that at the time of their death swans sing a song of mourning, but this is not correct, as I conclude based on certain experiments."<sup>82</sup> It is a humorous image: Pliny, the scientist, slaughtering swans in his backyard in an effort to make them sing. By means of these experiments, Pliny tests the swan song in the realm of this world and finds it to be false. Nevertheless, for Socrates, Cicero, Aelian and others, the

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<sup>80</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 84E; Cicero, *Tusc.* 1.30. For abundant citations, see Thompson's *Glossary of Greek Birds* (1936: 180-183).

<sup>81</sup> Aelian 2.32 and 5.34; see also 10.36.

<sup>82</sup> Pliny, *Natural History* 10.32.

swan's ability to foretell the moment of its death remains something otherworldly, something supernatural or superhuman. The Aesopic fable, of course, will instead go the route of this world, taking a form very similar to Pliny's backyard "experiments."

In one Aesopic fable about the swan's song, we meet a man who, like Pliny, wants the swan to sing on command but foolishly misunderstands what is required.<sup>43</sup>

Tous kuknous phasi para ton thanaton aidein. kai dê tis peritukhôn kuknôi pôloumenôi kai akousas hoti eumelestaton esti zôion, êgorase. kai ekhôn pote sundeipnous proselthôn parekalei auton aisai en tôi potôi. tou de tote men hêsukhasantos, husteron de pote, hôs enoêsen hoti apothnêiskein emelle, thrênountos heauton, ho despotês akousas ephê "all' ei su ouk allôs aideis, ean mê apothnêiskêis, egô mataios êmên tote, hote se parekaloun, all' ouk ethuon."

They say that swans sing at their death. Once a man found a swan for sale, and since he had heard that it was a most melodious creature, he bought it. Once when he had dinner guests, he went to the swan and told it to sing while they were drinking. The swan kept his silence then, but once later when he sensed that he was about to die, he began to sing his own dirge, and when his owner heard him, he said, "Well, if you won't sing except when you are dying, I was a fool [*egô mataios êmên*] to have asked you to sing instead of having killed you."

The story opens with a reference to the cliché, explaining that the swan sings at the moment of its death. Alas, the man who buys this swan is ignorant of this detail: he knows the swan sings, but he doesn't know that this song is produced only at the moment of death. The bird will not sing to entertain the man's dinner guests, and the man only realizes his mistake later when the bird bursts out into song at the moment of its death. Using the familiar Aesopic formula of self-abuse, he ridicules his mistake: "I was a fool..." In this case, then, a conventional motif of animal *mirabilia* is turned into the story of a mistake because the human protagonist of the story has a mistaken

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<sup>43</sup> Perry 233.



understanding of animal lore: he knows that swans are famous singers, but he does not understand that they sing only in the shadow of death. It is a quite absurd scenario, and much like the absurd story of the pregnant woman on the floor,<sup>84</sup> the "sense" of the story emerges only in its elegant application to a real-life situation: *outô tines tôn anthrôpôn, ha mê boulontai hekousiôs poiein, akontes taute apitelousin*, "this is also the case among men who refuse to do something freely, but who do perform when forced."<sup>85</sup>

In another Aesopic fable, the swan's song is again used to signal a mistake, but in this case, the mistake is made by a cook -- and this time the moral is about acting in haste. This cook is sent one night to fetch a goose for dinner but he accidentally seizes a pet swan instead. The Greek prose version of the story, however, does not clearly indicate what mistake has been made and by whom.<sup>86</sup>

Anêr euporôn khêna te hama kai kuknon amphô trephein ebouleto. etrephe de ouk eph' homoiois bouleumasi: ton men gar ôidês, ton de trapezês ekektêto kharin. hôs de edei ton khêna apothanein eph' hois etrepheto, nux men ên kai diaginôskein ho kairos ouk aphêken hekateron, ho kuknos de anti tou khênos apakhtheis ôidêi sêmainei tèn phusin, kai tèn teleutên diapheugei tôi melei.

A prosperous man decided to keep both a goose and a swan, but his intentions toward the two were different, for he had got the one for the sake of its song and the other for the sake of his table. When it was time for the goose to die for the cause for which it was being kept, it was night, and darkness prevented telling one from the other. The swan, although he got caught instead of the goose, gave indication of his nature by singing and escaped death by means of his music.

This Greek prose version of the fable has reached us in a somewhat confused state, but

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<sup>84</sup> Phaedrus 1.18 = Perry 479, cited on p. 33.

<sup>85</sup> Perry 233.

<sup>86</sup> Perry 399.

luckily the genius of LaFontaine salvages the story, focusing our attention on the cook, who identifies his near-mistake with a typical Aesopic formula of self-criticism:<sup>87</sup>

Un jour le Cuisinier, ayant trop bu d'un coup,  
Prit pour oison le Cygne; et le tenant au cou,  
Il allait l'égorger, puis le mettre en potage.  
L'oiseau, prêt à mourir, se plaint en son ramage.  
Le Cuisinier fut fort surpris,  
Et vit bien qu'il s'était mépris.  
"Quoi? je mettrais, dit-il,  
un tel chanteur en soupe!  
Non, non, ne plaise aux Dieux  
que jamais ma main coupe  
La gorge à qui s'en sert si bien!"  
Ainsi dans les dangers qui nous suivent en croupe  
Le doux parler ne nuit de rien.

The Cook, having drunk a glass too much one day, / Took swan for gosling.  
Grasping its neck midway / (He was making soup), he moved to cut its throat.  
/ The bird, about to die, sang its last plaintive note. / The Cook, in sudden shock  
and wonder, / Realized he'd almost committed a blunder: / "What? Should I put  
the owner of such a voice in the soup? / No, no, may the Gods forbid! Please  
don't ever let me stoop / To slaughtering a singer of such charm!" / Thus in  
dangers that follow behind and down us swoop, / Sweet, gentle speech does us  
no harm.

LaFontaine does not mention the darkness, but tells us that the cook is tipsy. For darkness, we can turn to Sir Roger L'Estrange's version:<sup>88</sup>

The Master of a House brought up a Swan and a Goose both together; the One for his Ear, the Other for his Belly. He gave Orders for the Goose to be taken up and Dress'd for Dinner. But the Place was so Dark, that the Cook took One for Th'other. This Mistake had Cost the Swan her Life, if she had not Sung in that very Instant, and discover'd her self; by which Means she both sav'd her Life and Express'd her Nature. A man cannot be too Careful of what he does, where the Life of any Creature is in Question. What are we the better for the Faculty of Reason, without the Exercise of it? If the Cook would but have been at the

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<sup>87</sup> LaFontaine 3.12 (translation by Norman Shapiro) = Perry 399.

<sup>88</sup> L'Estrange 158 (1906: 255) = Perry 399.

Trouble of carrying a Candle with him, he would have been in no Danger of taking a Swan for a Goose.

These three different versions of the cook's mistake -- the Greek prose version, LaFontaine, and Roger L'Estrange -- show how an Aesopic fable must be judged on the merits of its telling. Every fable is realized with greater, or lesser, success each time that it is (re)told. The Greek prose version has little to commend it. In the absence of any "last words" spoken by a character in the story, the moral of the fable remains rather obscure. LaFontaine restores the cook to a more prominent place in the story, and uses the cook's own witty "last words" to make it clear that the cook came very close to making a terrible mistake. Yet despite this elegant speech by the cook, the concluding remarks of LaFontaine shift the focus back to the swan as if the logical outcome of the plot were to teach us to be like the swan, singing sweetly when we are in danger. This is certainly good advice, but it neglects the cook and his own mistake, which are the focus of the plot and the cook's own "last words." L'Estrange extracts the most logical Aesopic moral from the story -- do not be a fool, acting in haste and ignorance like the cook! -- but L'Estrange lacks the witty "last words" spoken by LaFontaine's cook, so that in his version this excellent moral is expressed only in the author's concluding remarks appended to the story. Nevertheless, in terms of the story itself, that is, both the plot and its moral, L'Estrange seems to have had the best understanding of the story, while the Greek prose author and LaFontaine are somehow distracted by the motif of the swan's song, which has only a tenuous relationship to the traditional world of Aesopic foolishness and abuse.

It is awkward to base an Aesopic fable on the mysterious swan song because the

way a swan sings before its death does not necessarily have anything to do with the "story of a mistake" that characterizes the Aesopic fable. For a writer like Aelian, on the other hand, given his interest in the supernatural and superhuman aspects of the animal world, the "swan song" is inherently exemplary: in and of itself, the swan's song shows us how to have a cheerful attitude toward death, and to sing our own praises or praise the gods at the moment of our death. Such lofty advice does not sit well in Aesop's world, however, where lessons are learned simply by making mistakes. In these two Aesopic fables, the swan sings his song, but he does not make any mistake; he is not the focal point of the story but is only a prop, an occasion for somebody else to make a mistake (e.g., the ignorant owner who wants to use the swan to impress his dinner-guests, or the careless cook who is supposed to be cooking a goose for dinner). Thus, while both Aelian and Aesop make use of the "same" swan-song motif, they put this motif to radically different purposes.

Like the swan's song, the ability of the hyena to change its gender was another standard *topos* in the ancient natural history writers. Aelian is even able to make this weird hyena a positive exemplum for mankind: the incredible sex-shifting of the hyena just goes to show, he says, that the true wonders of nature far exceed the limited powers of human poetic invention, such as the trifling tales of Teiresias or Caeneus.<sup>89</sup>

tên huainan têtes men arrena ei theasaio, tên autên es neôta opsei thêlun: ei de thêlun nun, meta tauta arrena: koinônousi te aphroditês hekateras, kai gamousi te kai gamountai, ana etos pan ameibousai to genos. oukoun ton Kainea kai ton Teiresian arkhaious apedeixe to zôion touto ou kompois alla tois ergois autois.

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<sup>89</sup> Aelian 1.25.

Should you this year set eyes on a male hyena, next year you will see the same creature as a female; conversely, if you see a female now, next time you will see a male. They share the attributes of both sexes and are both husband and wife, changing their sex year by year. So then it is not through extravagant tales but by actual facts that this animal has made Caeneus and Teiresias old-fashioned.

The motif of the hermaphrodite hyena is quite amenable to the Aesopic fable tradition: an animal that shifts its gender from year to year creates precisely the possibility for making a mistake, and there are two Aesopic fables which exploit this possibility for error. One story is about a fox who wisely recognizes ("R-not-M") that it is impossible to befriend a creature who changes its gender like this, back and forth:<sup>90</sup>

Tas huainas phasi, par eniauton allassomenês autôn tês phuseôs, pote men arrenas, pote de thêleias ginesthai. kai dê huaina theasamenê alôpeka emempheto autên hoti philên autêi genesthai theousan ou prosietai. ka'kainê hupotukhousa eipen "all' eme mê memphou, tên de sên phusin, di' hên agnoô poteron hôs philêi ê hôs philôi soi khrêsomai."

They say that hyenas change their nature annually and are sometimes male and sometimes female. In fact, a (female) hyena once saw a (female) fox and complained that the fox wouldn't accept her friendly overtures. But the fox retorted, "Don't blame me. Blame your own nature. I can't tell whether to treat you as a male or a female friend."

Another, even more ingenious fable involves the mistake made by a male hyena in raping a female hyena, not realizing that she can pay him back next year, when she will be a he, and he will be a she. The female hyena corrects his mistake ("M-versus-R"):<sup>91</sup>

Tas huainas phasi par' eniauton allattein tên phusin kai pote men arrenas ginesthai, pote de thêleias. kai dê pote arsên huaina thêleiai para phusin dietethê. hê de hupotukhousa ephê "all, ô houtos, houtô tauta pratte hôs eggus ta auta peisomenos."

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<sup>90</sup> Perry 242.

<sup>91</sup> Perry 243.

They say that hyenas change their nature annually and are sometimes male and sometimes female. In fact, a male hyena was unnaturally attracted towards a female hyena, and she said to him, "Go ahead, my dear, but remember that whatever you do now, you will soon have done to you."

Both of these stories begin with an explicit citation of the animal behavior cliché (as was also the case in one of the "swan-song" fables<sup>92</sup>). This kind of explanatory introduction is not usually part of the Aesopic tradition, in which the animals are meant to be self-explanatory in their behavior. I would argue that these little introductions reveal that the fable is importing a bit of material from another tradition, from the *mirabilia* that was such a prominent part of ancient animal lore. Having provided this introductory information, however, the stories then set the formulaic plot elements of the fable in motion, so that both of these hyena fables conclude with the witty "last words" that are typical of the Aesopic genre, equally insulting and instructive. The fox points out that she is not about to make the mistake of befriending a creature to whom the usual rules of gender do not apply. The female hyena, meanwhile, points out the mistake being made by the male hyena: he is foolish to commit a crime against a female hyena when he will soon have to occupy the same position himself.<sup>93</sup>

The ambiguity of the hyena's gender is an elegant basis on which to build the story of a mistake; precisely because the hyena motif involves ambiguity, this creature is "a mistake just waiting to happen," as it were. The same is true of other ambiguous animals, such as the bat or the ostrich, both of whom provide a suitable occasion for

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<sup>92</sup> Perry 233, cited on p. 52.

<sup>93</sup> For the sex changes of the rooster as reported by Aelian, see the discussion in Bettini, *Nascere* (1998: 84-85).

Aesopic fables of mistaken identity. There are three such fables about the bat or the ostrich which are dispersed throughout the Greek Aesopic prose tradition, but Sir Roger L'Estrange brings all three of them together in a little triptych, making it clear how all three stories exploit the same sort of natural "ambiguity" in order to make their point.

A Bat and a Weazle.<sup>94</sup>

A Weazle had seiz'd upon a Bat, and the Bat begg'd for Life. No, no, says the Wezle, I give no Quarter to Birds. Ah, (says the Bat) but I am a Mouse you see; look on my Body else: And so she got off for that Bout. The same Bat had the Fortune to be taken a-while after by another Weazle; and there the poor Bat was forc'd to beg for Mercy once again. No, says the Weazle, no Mercy to a Mouse. Well (says t'other) but you may see by my Wings that I'm a Bird; and so the Bat scap'd in both Capacities, by playing the Trimmer.

A Bat, Birds, and Beasts.<sup>95</sup>

Upon a desperate and double Battel betwixt the Birds and the Beasts, the Bat stood Neuter, till she found that the Beasts had the better on't, and then went over to the stronger Side. But it came to pass afterward (as the Chance of War is various) that the Birds rally'd their broken Troops, and carry'd the Day; and away she went then to t'other Party, where she was try'd by a Council of War as a Deserter; stript, banish'd and finally condemn'd never to see Day-light again.

An Estrich, Birds, and Beasts.<sup>96</sup>

The Estrich is a Creature that passes in common Reputation, for Half-Bird, Half-Beast. This amphibious Wretch happen'd to be taken twice the same Day in a Battle betwixt the Birds and the Beasts, and as an Enemy to both Parties. The Birds would have him to be a Beast, and the Beasts concluded him to be a Bird; but upon shewing his Feet to prove that he was no Bird, and upon shewing his Wings, and his Beak, to prove that he was not Beast, they were satisfy'd upon the

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<sup>94</sup> L'Estrange 40 (1906: 109) = Perry 172. L'Estrange's rearrangement of the fables into thematic groups is one of the most interesting aspects of this important seventeenth-century collection.

<sup>95</sup> L'Estrange 41 (1906: 110) = Perry 566. For a lengthy discussion of this fable in the *Esopo toscano*, see Chapter 5.

<sup>96</sup> L'Estrange 42 (1906: 110-111) = Perry 418.

whole Matter, that though he seem'd to be both, he was yet in Truth neither the one nor the other.

The moral of the Three Fables above: Trimming, in some Cases, is foul and dishonest; in others laudable, and in some again not only honest but necessary. The Nicety lies in the Skill of distinguishing upon Cases, Times and Degrees. We are taught in some Cases to yield to Times and Occasions; but with a Saving still to Honour and to Conscience. A wise and an honest Man will always mean the same thing; but he's a Fool that always says the same thing.

By putting these three fables of ambiguity together, L'Estrange makes it very clear that the motif itself is not the bearer of the moral: for an animal to exploit its ambiguity may be a way to lead another animal into a welcome mistake (when the bat fools the weasels, or the ostrich fools the beasts and birds), but it may also be a way for an animal to commit a fatal mistake (the bat dissembling with the beasts and the birds). It is the plot, not the motif, that produces the value judgment of the moral and identifies the mistake that has been made; the motif by itself is not enough to demonstrate the lesson. L'Estrange also openly acknowledges the moral inconsistency of the world of Aesop: in some cases, it is good to lie and dissemble (as the ostrich does, or like the bat with the weasels), but in other cases the attempt to lie and dissemble can meet with a severe form of punishment (the bat in the battle of the beasts and the birds). Consistency itself is not a virtue or, as L'Estrange puts it, "he's a Fool that always says the same thing." As discussed earlier, the Aesopic fables are not a vehicle for a fixed set of values. Instead, they provide a narrative space in which different values can be contested, and the advantages (and disadvantages) of various choices can be dramatized and compared. There is a single type of Aesopic plot -- the story of a mistake -- but the moral contents of that plot are limitless and highly variable, as we will see in the following chapter.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **The Morals of Aesopic Fables: Inside and Outside the Tale**

#### **Part One. Endomysium: The Moral Inside the Fable**

In the previous chapter, I proposed a typology of the Aesopic fable based on the characteristic structure of its plot, which I defined as a brief and witty exemplum based on the punishment or prevention of a mistake. In the early part of that chapter I linked this type of plot to a didactic strategy commonly attested in popular sayings and proverbs from antiquity: negative exempla are instructive because it is possible to learn from one's own mistakes or from the mistakes of others. I will now return to this didactic function of the Aesopic fable, focusing this time on the question of how the "moral" of the fable furthers this process of learning by means of mistakes. The plot of the Aesopic fable dramatizes a mistake and the moral of the fable then identifies that mistake in a declarative statement. The combination of the narrative and declarative aspects of the fable are what allow it to succeed as a didactic genre: the plot recounts the mistake, and the moral reports it. But where exactly do we find the moral of the Aesopic fable? The main argument of this chapter will be that modern scholarship has consistently misunderstood the morals of the fables, largely because modern scholars have focused on the literary transmission of the Aesopic fable rather than considering its origins as an oral folklore phenomenon. I will argue that Aesopic fables were originally a form of ritualized speech, a popular genre of oral communication. Presumably the Aesopic fable was a widely practiced form of ritualized speech in both ancient Greece and Rome, given

the frequency with which it enters into the literary production of these cultures.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the oral nature of the fable was of primary importance, and it is only by fully appreciating this oral dimension of the fable that we can hope to reach a formal understanding of the "morals" of the stories.

As an indicator of the neglect to which the morals of the fables have been consigned in modern scholarship we need look no farther than Lloyd Daly's translation of Perry's *Aesopica*, unabashedly entitled *Aesop without Morals*. In the preface to that book, Daly explains that he "has freed the fables from the encumbrance of the morals, which are at best supererogatory" and "little more than an insult to our intelligence."<sup>2</sup> Technically speaking, the morals which Daly removed are the so-called promythia and epimythia,<sup>3</sup> the little prescripts and postscripts that were added to the fables by their ancient editors. These epimythia tend to reflect those editors' interests and

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to the Greek prose collections, Aesopic fables are also frequently found in a variety of ancient literary genres, especially comic genres. For an extensive treatment of the Aesopic fable as it appears in archaic, classical and Hellenistic Greek literature, see van Dijk (1997).

<sup>2</sup> Daly (1961: 12): "The cynical vein of the stories themselves runs so strong that it must be obvious they were not intended for the edification of youth, and it is in such a light that I would present them in this new translation, freed from the encumbrance of the added morals, which are at best supererogatory. If we dispense with the morals, which are little more than an insult to our intelligence, how are we to understand the existence of such a collection of tales? [...]"

<sup>3</sup> On the terminology of promythium and epimythium, see van Dijk (1997: 86-87). In this chapter, I have generally conflated the problem of the promythium and the epimythium. Unlike Perry, I consider the promythium and epimythium to serve essentially the same function, glossing the moral of the story in literal, rather than figurative terms. For an analysis of the use of epimythia as opposed to promythia in the ancient Greek fable collections, see Perry (1940).

preoccupations<sup>4</sup> and, not surprisingly, their interests preoccupations are often quite different from our own, with the result that the morals they append to the fables frequently seem weird or bizarre. In this sense, the epimythia of Aesopic fables resemble ancient scholia to the Greek classics or early Biblical exegesis: the interpretations are sometimes informative but often baffling, with what seems to be only a tenuous connection to the original text (and, of course, the ancient scholiasts and exegetes would no doubt feel the same way about our own interpretations of those same texts). Nevertheless, when Daly removes the epimythia from the fables, he still has not produced an "Aesop without morals;" the very idea is a contradiction in terms. Even without the epimythium, the Aesopic fable must contain a moral. This moral *inside the story* is what I will call the endo-mythium.<sup>5</sup>

### ***The Endomythium: A Moral Inside the Fable***

In the previous chapter, we saw many examples of the endomythium at work; Aesopic fables typically end with a sharp comment by one of the story's characters, the biting "last words" that declare the mistake which has been made in the course of the story. In the story of the goat and the fox in the well, for example, the fox speaks the

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<sup>4</sup> As Theon notes in his *Progymnasmata*, any number of epimythia (which he calls *epilogoî*) can be added to a fable. It can happen that there are many epimythia for a single fable, based on each of the elements (*pragmata*) inside the fable which catch our attention, and conversely there can be many different stories suited to the same epimythium (for Theon's text and a discussion, see van Dijk, 1997: 409-412).

<sup>5</sup> "Endomythium" is a term of my own invention; given the international array of Aesopic scholarship, a pseudo-Greek term seemed preferable to an English one.

last words of the fable, insulting the goat for foolishly descending into the well:<sup>6</sup>

tou de tragou memphomenou autên hôs tas homologias parabainousan, epistrapheisa eipen "ô houtos, all' ei tosaútas phrenas eikhes hosas en tõi pôgõni trikhas, ou proteron dê katabebêkeis prin ê tèn anodon eskepsô."

When the goat complained that the fox was breaking their agreement, she turned around and said, "My good fellow, if your wits [phrenas] were as abundant as the hairs in your beard, you wouldn't have gotten down there before you thought about how you would get out."

In this typical "M-versus-R" type of fable, the goat has made a mistake, and this mistake is identified and rudely rebuked in the endomythium pronounced by the fox, who specifically calls attention to the goat's stupidity ("If your wits were as abundant as the hairs in your beard..."). The verbal catastrophe of being insulted is in some sense worse than a physical catastrophe in the world of Aesop. Thus, when the crane foolishly demands a reward for having extracted the bone from the wolf's throat, the wolf insults the crane but does not physically attack the foolish bird. The insulting rebuke is, by itself, enough to designate the crane as the mistaken party in this dispute:<sup>7</sup>

pro quo cum pactum flagitaret praemium, "Ingrata es" inquit "ore quae nostro caput incolume abstuleris et mercedem postules."

But when she demanded the fee which had been promised, the wolf said, "You ungrateful creature! You safely extracted your head from our jaws, and yet you demand a reward [mercedem] further bonus."

In this case, the moral of the fable is expressed in the concrete details of the story: the crane's head in the jaws of the wolf and the reward (*merces*) which the wolf had

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<sup>6</sup> Perry 9, cited on p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Perry 156, cited on p. 23.

promised to his rescuer. In other cases, however, the endomythium can shift to a language that is detached from the narrative context of the plot, offering a more abstract formulation of the mistake made by the protagonist, as in the story of the fox and the stork:<sup>8</sup>

quae cum lagonae collum frustra lamberet,  
peregrinam sic locutam volucrem accipimus:  
Sua quique exempla debet aequo animo pati.

As the fox in vain was licking the neck of the bottle, the migratory bird (or so we have heard) told the fox: "You should suffer with equanimity when treated according to your own example."

In both cases, the endomythium is addressed to the character who has made a mistake in the story; the "R" character is verbally rebuking the "M" character, calling attention to the mistake that the "M" character has made. Yet there is an important difference between the concrete language of the wolf's words attacking the crane as opposed to the abstract language of the stork's attack on the fox: this tension between literal and figurative language will prove to be a crucial factor in the rise of the promythia and the epimythia, the morals appended to the fables in the literary tradition. Traditional Aesopic fables contained endomythia that were expressed in the "realia" of the story: the crane's head perilously inserted in the jaws of the wolf, the number of hairs to be found in a goat's beard. It was precisely this concrete yet enigmatic language which prompted the need for further explanations of the moral, translations of the figurative language of the endomythium into more literal but also more abstract terms. The stork's use of abstract language in Phaedrus's account of the "fox and the stork" is thus not an entirely typical

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<sup>8</sup> Phaedrus 1.26 = Perry 426, cited on p. 35.

Aesopic endomythium. Rather, it is already the result of Phaedrus's literary reworking of the fable tradition, in which the literal, abstract language of the epimythium begins to invade and displace the traditionally concrete, figurative language of the traditional endomythium, a topic discussed at length in Chapter 3.

Given the various configurations of "M" and "R" in the different types of Aesopic plots, it is not surprising that there are also various possibilities for the way in which the endomythium is formulated. While it is obvious that an "R" character could pronounce the endomythium, abusing and reviling the foolish "M" character (as we have seen in the previous examples), it is also possible for the "M" character to engage in verbal self-abuse. This strange self-punishing function of the endomythium is a strongly characteristic feature of the "M=R" type of Aesopic fable, as we saw already in the story of the man who bought a swan for its song:<sup>9</sup>

ho despotês akousas ephê "all' ei su ouk allôs aideis, ean mê apothnêiskêis, egô mataios êmên tote, hote se parekaloun, all' ouk ethuon."

When his owner heard the swan, he said, "Well, if you won't sing except when you are dying, I was a fool [mataios] to have asked you to sing instead of having killed you."

In this case, the "M" character identifies himself as being mistaken: "I was a fool to have asked you to sing...". In other cases, the "M" character does not declare himself to have been a fool, but instead approves the form of his own punishment -- "It is right that I am now condemned to die..." We saw an example of this formulaic self-condemnation in the story of the doves who foolishly chose the kite to be their king. As

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<sup>9</sup> Perry 233, cited on p. 52.

the kite devours the defenseless birds one by one, the endomythium is pronounced by the one bird who is left alive; indeed, this one bird must be left alive in order to pronounce the moral of the story.<sup>10</sup>

qui regnum adeptus coepit vesci singulas  
et exercere imperium saevis unguibus.  
tunc de reliquiis una: "Merito plectimur,  
huic spiritum praedoni quae commisimus."

Having been made king, the kite began to feast on them one by one, asserting his authority with fierce talons. Finally one of the surviving doves admitted: "We deserve to be punished [*merito plectimur*] for having given our life's breath over to this brigand."

The foolish "M" character in the fables often finds himself in the throes of death but nevertheless manages to gasp out the moral of the story before being mauled in the talons of the hawk, burned up in the fire of a candle, slaughtered under the butcher's knife, etc. In fact, the strange juxtaposition of the plot's culminating moment and the verbal declaration of the moral calls attention to the extraordinary importance of the moral in the overall construction of the fable. If the fable were simply a matter of plot -- of *showing* the mistake -- then it would be enough for the kite to eat the foolish doves while the wolf could simply bite the foolish crane's head off. As we have seen, however, it is not always a physical act which brings the story to a close. Instead, it is often the last line of dialogue, the famous "last words" of the fable which constitute the point of the story. When the mistake is fatal, the fable's "last words" thus coincide with what are literally the "last words" of the "M" character, who utters the endomythium as he is

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<sup>10</sup> Phaedrus 1.31 = Perry 486, cited on p. 26.

dying. The stag at the spring is a typical example:<sup>11</sup>

Tunc moriens edidisse vocem hanc dicitur:  
O me infelicem, qui nunc demum intelligo,  
utilia mihi quam fuerint quae despexeram,  
et quae laudaram quantum luctus habuerint.

As he was dying, the stag is said to have pronounced this speech [*moriens edidisse vocem hanc dicitur*]: "Oh woe is me, now at last I understand [*nunc demum intelligo*]: the things which I despised were useful, and what a grief there was from the things that I praised!"

*Nunc demum intelligo*: at last I understand. The stag's dying confession could stand as an emblematic motto for the entire Aesopic tradition: the foolish "M" character finally understands the nature of his mistake, but this time it is too late for him to do anything about it. *Sero sapiunt Phryges*.

In a different structural variation, an otherwise superfluous character can be introduced into the story solely for the purpose of pronouncing the endomythium; in the previous chapter, I called this character the "interloper." The presence of such an interloper, whose only function is to pronounce the endomythium of the story, again calls attention to the importance of the endomythium for the overall construction of the fable. For example, in the story of the fox and the rabbit in the well, the fox plays no role in the plot, but is introduced into the story only in order to identify and rebuke the mistake made by the foolish rabbit:<sup>12</sup>

alôpêx de elthousa ka'keise touton heurousa ephê pros auton "megalôs ontôs esphalês: proteron gar ôpheiles bouleusasthai pôs estai soi tou phreatos anelthein, eith' houtôs en autôi katelthein."

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<sup>11</sup> Phaedrus 1.12 = Perry 74, cited on p. 28.

<sup>12</sup> Perry 408, from Syntipas 10, cited on p. 30.



When a fox came along and found him there, he said, "You made a great mistake [megalôs ontôs esphalês]. You ought to have decided first how you were going to get out before you decided to go down into the well."

The endomythium can thus be pronounced by any of the characters in the fable: the "M" character, the "R" character, or an interloper who actually has no role whatsoever in the plot of the story. This flexibility in the formulaic structure of the fable gives each and every storyteller the freedom to choose the way in which the endomythium will be expressed in the version of the fable that they produce for the specific occasion of their performance. In some cases, in fact, we possess different versions of the "same" story in which the endomythium is assigned to different characters. This is the case in the two Greek versions of the jackdaw trying to imitate an eagle, a pair of stories discussed in the previous chapter. In one version of the story, the "M" character, the jackdaw himself, pronounces the endomythium in the very moment that his foolish mistake reaches its disastrous conclusion:<sup>13</sup>

"dikên d' anoiês" eipen "axiôs tinô:  
ti gar ôn koloios aietous emimoumên;"

The jackdaw said, "It is right [axiôs] that I pay the penalty for my folly [anoiês]. Why did I, who am only a jackdaw, try to imitate the eagles?"

In a different version of the same story, the endomythium is pronounced by an interloper, a shepherd, whose only purpose in the plot is to rebuke the foolish "M" character:<sup>14</sup>

tôn de punthanomenôn ti eiê to orneon, ephê "hôs men egô saphôs oida, kolois,  
hôs de autos bouletai, aetos."

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<sup>13</sup> Babrius 137 = Perry 2, cited on p. 31.

<sup>14</sup> Perry 2, cited on p. 31.

When the children asked what kind of bird this was, the shepherd said, "I know perfectly well [*saphôs oida*] he's a jackdaw, but he thinks he's an eagle."

This variation between the two versions of the story gives us a clue as to the kind of "improvisational" possibilities offered by this folkloric form: a storyteller is free to work within the structural confines of the fable in order to produce original variations on a familiar theme.

The "M-versus-R" type of fable thus offers several possibilities for expressing the moral of the story: the endomythium can be pronounced by the "R" character (the fox who tricks the goat into getting into the well and then insults the poor creature's stupid mistake), by the "M" character (as in the case of the doves being eaten by the kite whom they foolishly elected to be their king), or by an interloper (the shepherd who finds the jackdaw already trapped in the wool of the sheep). In an "R-not-M" type of fable, however, the possibilities are reduced, because the two functions of the plot are combined in a single character. Thus, in the story of the wise goat who decides not to go down into the grassy meadow where the wolf (or lion) is waiting, it is the goat himself who explains his reasoning, both in the prose and verse versions of the story:<sup>15</sup>

hê de apekrinato pros auton "all' ouk eme epi nomên kaleis, autos de trophês aporeis."

The goat answered, "That would all be very well if I didn't know that you are not so much interested in inviting me to pasture as you are in your own lack of food."

illa gemens "desiste, precor, fallaciter" inquit  
"securam placidis instimulare dolis,  
vera licet moneas, maiora pericula tollas,

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<sup>15</sup> The prose version is Perry 157 (cited on p. 12); Avianus 26 is the metrical version.

tu tamen his dictis non facis esse fidem:  
nam quamvis rectis constet sententia verbis,  
suspectam hanc ravidus consiliator habet."

But the goat groaned and said, "Please stop trying to trick me out of my serenity with your enticing lies [*dolis*]. Although your observations might be true and you might save me from some serious danger, I still do not trust what you say: even when advice is spoken with true words, the hunger of the speaker still arouses suspicion."

In Avianus's verse fable, the goat specifically identifies the lion's words as "tricks" (*dolis*) which the goat very wisely avoids. This kind of fable provides further evidence for the ambivalent position of the trickster in the world of the Aesopic fable: as in the story of the goat and the fox in the well,<sup>16</sup> this tricky lion is not the hero of the story, but only a foil to the cautious goat, just as the fox was a foil to the foolish goat in the story of the goat in the well. In both cases, the goat is put the test, placed in a situation where it would be possible to make a stupid mistake: but while the one goat foolishly descends into the well, the other goat wisely sees through the predator's seductive strategy and prevents himself from making a foolish mistake. In either case, it is the goat -- not the tricky antagonist -- who is the focal point of the story's moral.

### ***Formulas of Foolishness in the Endomythium***

There are a variety of formulas used to indicate the "mistake" that takes place in the fable. In the Greek tradition, one typical formula involves the verb *planaô*, "to make a blunder, to go astray," as in the locust's rebuke of the fox:<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Perry 9, cited on p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Perry 241, cited on p. 14.

prosdramousês de < autês > hôs epi ton tettiga, ephê "alla peplanêsai, ô hautê, ei hupelabes me katabêsesthai: egô gar ap' ekeinou alôpekas phulattomai aph' hou en aphodeumati alôpekos ptera tettigos etheasamên."

As the fox pounced upon it, thinking it was the locust, the locust then said, "You made a blunder, my friend [peplanêsai, ô hautê], if you supposed I would come down, for I've been on my guard against foxes ever since the time I saw locust wings in some fox dung."

This same motif of the error or blunder (Greek *planaô*), appears in the endomythia of other Greek fables, as in this prose version of the fable about the archer and the lion:<sup>18</sup>

Anêlthe tis eis oros toxotês empeiros kunêgêsai. Panta de ta zôia ephugon, leôn de monos proekaleito auton pros makhên. Ho de belos pempsas kai ton leonta balôn eipen: "Ide ton emon aggelon hoios estin, kai dê tote eperkhomai soi k'agô." Ho de leôn blêtheis hôrmêse pheugein. Alôpekos de toutôi tharreîn kai mê pheugein legousês, ephê ho leôn: "Oudamôs me planêseis: hopou gar toiouton pikron aggelon ekhei, ean autos epelthêi moi, ti poiêsô:"

An expert archer had gone up on the mountain for a hunt. All the animals fled, and the lion alone came forward for battle. Having launched an arrow that struck the lion, the archer said, "You see what sort of messenger I send, and next I myself will come at you." The wounded lion then proceeded to run away. But a fox urged him to not flee, to which the lion replied: "By no means will you make a fool out of me [oudamôs me planêseis]! When he has such a pointed messenger, what would I do if he himself were to attack me."

The same phrase, *oudamôs me planêseis*, also appears in Babrius's metrical version of the same story:<sup>19</sup>

"ou me planêseis" phêsin, "oud' enedreuseis:  
hopou gar houtô pikron aggelon pempei,  
pôs autos êdê phoberos esti ginôskô."

The lion said, "You are not going to fool me [ou me planêseis], or catch me in an ambush! When he sends such a sharp messenger, I know already how terrible he himself must be."

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<sup>18</sup> Perry 340.

<sup>19</sup> Babrius 1 = Perry 340.

In this case, we are dealing with an "R-not-M" type of fable, in which the lion recognizes that it would be foolish to follow the fox's advice and confront the archer<sup>20</sup> (much like the goat who refuses the invitation of the wolf and the lion to join them in the grass<sup>21</sup>). In another fable, the verb *planaô* is used by an interloper to make fun of the foolish character who is actively engaged in a stupid activity, in this case a jackdaw waiting for figs to ripen on a tree:<sup>22</sup>

Koloios limôttôn epi tinos sukês ekathisen. heurôn de tous olunthous mêdepô pepeirous prosemenen heôs suka genôntai. alôpêx de theasamenê auton egkhronizonta kai tèn aitian par' autou mathousa ephê "alla peplanêsai, ô houtos, elpisi prosekhôn, hêtis boukolein men oide, trephein de oudamôs."

A hungry jackdaw lit on a fig tree and, finding the figs still small and unripe, settled down to wait for them to ripen. A fox saw him lingering there and when he found out why, the fox said: "But you have made a blunder, my friend [peplanêsai, ô houtos], to trust so much in your hopes. For hope can lead you to pasture but cannot fill your stomach."

Except for the change in gender -- *houtos* for the jackdaw (*koloios*), as opposed to *hautê* for the fox (*alôpêx*) -- the formula is the same: *alla peplanêsai, ô houtos/hautê*.<sup>23</sup> The

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<sup>20</sup> This is also another incongruous fable, like the story of the pregnant woman on the floor: the lion really has no reason to be afraid of the man, but the lion's attitude can be usefully applied to many real-life situations. The truth of the story depends not on the literal situation of the story (i.e., the lion is probably more powerful than the man is), but on the elegance of its figurative application.

<sup>21</sup> Perry 157, cited on p. ?.

<sup>22</sup> Perry 126.

<sup>23</sup> In addition to the use of *planaô*, "to be in error," in the endomythia of Aesopic fables, the verb also seems to have an emblematic value within the plot as well, as a way to describe the dangers of literally "going astray." For example, in Babrius's version of the wolf and the lamb at the stream (Babrius 89 = Perry 155), the lamb gets into trouble precisely because it has "strayed" from the flock; so too in the story of the wolf and his own shadow, which begins with a statement that the wolf encountered his own shadow after "straying" in desert places (Perry 260, cited on p. 79).

Aesopic fable is marked by many such formulaic expressions of rebuke; these ritual phrases are one of the hallmark characteristics of the Aesopic fable genre.

Another typical formula of the Aesopic endomythium involves the abusive identification of the fool, as in the story of the swan and his owner, who declares himself to be a fool, *mataios*.<sup>24</sup>

ho despotês akousas ephê "all' ei su ouk allôs aideis, ean mê apothnêiskêis, egô mataios êmên tote, hote se parekaloun, all' ouk ethuon."

when his owner heard him, he said, "Well, if you won't sing except when you are dying, I was a fool [*mataios*] to have asked you to sing instead of having killed you."

The same explicit identification of the "M" character as a fool, Greek *mataios* (like the Latin *stultus*), occurs in the story of the hen and the snake's eggs.<sup>25</sup>

Ornis opheôs ôa heurousa kai tauta epimelôs ekthermanasa exekolapse. khelidôn de theasamenê autên ephê "ô mataia, ti tauta anatrepheis, haper, an auxêthêi, apo sou prôtês tou adikein arxetai;"

A hen found some snake's eggs, and carefully kept them warm, and hatched them out. A swallow saw her and said, "You fool! [*mataia*] Why are you raising these beasts? If they ever grow up, they'll begin by hurting you first."

In this case, the hen is rebuked by an interloper, but the formula remains unchanged: the abusive formula can be directed at oneself ("I was a fool") or at another character ("you fool!"), based on the specific exigencies of the story-telling situation.

The abusive vocabulary of the "fool" can also be invoked in an "R-not-M" fable, as when the boar explains to the fox the wisdom of sharpening his tusks even in the

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<sup>24</sup> Perry 233, cited on p. 52.

<sup>25</sup> Perry 192. Note also the version in Syntipas 57, with the apostrophe: *ô môra kai anaisthête*, "oh you foolish and senseless creature!"

absence of immediate danger:<sup>26</sup>

Hus agrios hestôs para ti dendron tous odontas êkona. alôpekos de auton erôtôsês tèn aitian di' hên mête kunêgou mête kindunou enestôtos tous odontas thêgei, ephê "all' ou mataiôs touto poiô: ean gar me kindunos katalabêi, ou tote peri to akonan askholêsomai, hetoimois de ousi khrêsomai."

A boar was standing by a tree, whetting his tusks on it. A fox asked him why he was sharpening his tusks when there was no hunter around and no immediate danger, and the boar said, "But I am not acting like a fool [all' ou mataiôs touto poiô]. Now when danger arrives, I won't need to whet my tusks, but will have them ready for use."

The plot of this fable is completely uninteresting; like most "R-not-M" fables, it is in fact a "non-plot" in which nothing actually happens. Instead, the point of the fable depends entirely on the endomythium, and its pointed discussion of fools and foolishness. Even though the fox may think that the boar is being foolish and wasting his time, the boar instead explains that he is not a fool at all ("R-not-M"), *ou mataiôs poiô*.

Babrius also invokes the "fool" in an "R-not-M" type of fable, the story of the little fish who is trying to persuade the fisherman not to cast him back into the water. In this case, however, the fable develops into a rather more lengthy dialogue between the characters, in which the little fish goes to great efforts to persuade the fisherman to set him free. The fisherman, however, is much too wise to be taken in by such rhetoric; despite the persuasive words spoken by the fish, he recognizes that to take this advice would be a foolish choice indeed:<sup>27</sup>

Halieus thalassês pasan êiona xuôn  
kalamôi te leptôi ton glukun bion sôizôn

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<sup>26</sup> Perry 224.

<sup>27</sup> Babrius 6 = Perry 18.

mikron pot' ikhthun hormiês aph' hippeiês  
 êgreusen, ek tôn eis tagênon hôraiôn.  
 ho d' auton hiketeue prosdokôn peisein:  
 "ti soi to kerdos; ê posou me pôlêseis;  
 ouk eimi gar teleios, alla me prôiên  
 pros têide petrêi phukis eptusen mêtêr.  
 nun oun aphen me, mê matên m' apokteinêis.  
 epên de plêstheis phukiôn thalassaïôn  
 megas genômai, plousiois prepôn deipnois,  
 tot' enthad' elthôn husteron me sullêpsêi."  
 toiauta muzôn hiketeuen aspairôn,  
 all' ouk emelle ton geronta thôpeusein:  
 ephê de peirôn auton oxeêi skhoinôi  
"ho mê ta mikra, plên bebaia, têrêsas  
mataios estin, ên adêla thêreuêi."

A fisherman, scouring the whole seashore with a slender rod in order to preserve the sweetness of life, once caught on his horsehair line a small fish, one large enough for his frying pan. The little fish begged his captor to spare him, expecting to win his plea. "What am I worth to you, or how much will you sell me for? I'm not yet grown. Why, it was only a day or two ago that my mother spawning in the seaweed cast me forth by this rocky shore. For the present, therefore, let me go, and do not kill me foolishly [*mê matên m' apokteinêis*]. When, after eating my fill of the seaweed, I shall grow large and suitable for a rich man's dinner, then, later on, you will come here and catch me." Such was the piteous plea murmured by the little fish as he gasped for life; but he had no chance of success in wheedling the old man. And the latter remarked, as he stuck the little fellow on his sharp stringer of reed: "That man is a fool [*mataios estin*] who fails to keep small but certain profits, in the hope of acquiring uncertain ones."

In this case, the little fish is engaging the fisherman in a debate over what is foolish and what is not: according to the fish, it would a foolish thing (*matê*) for the fisherman to kill the little fish, but the fisherman knows better. Thus, the endomythium of the fable declares definitively that the man would be a fool (*mataios*) if he were to let the little fish go, hoping to get bigger fish in the future. We can compare Babrius's use of *mataios* in his verse adaptation of this story to a synonymous use of *euêthês* in the Greek prose version of this same story. Once again, the fisherman declares himself to be an "R-not-



M" type of character, somebody who would be utterly stupid, *euêthestatos*, if he did not keep his wits about him:<sup>28</sup>

ho halieus eipen "all' egôge euêthestatos an eiên. ei to en khersi pareis kerdos adêlon elpida diôkoimi."

And the fisherman said, "I would certainly be a simpleton [*euêthestatos*] if I let go the gain I have in hand and went chasing after some vague hope."

Likewise, in Avianus's version of the same story we find the emblematic Latin term, *stulte*:<sup>29</sup>

nam miserum est, inquit, praesentem amittere praedam, stultius et rursum vota futura sequi.

He said: "It is a wretched thing to lose the spoil you have at hand, and it is even more foolish [*stultius*] to set off again in pursuit of future hopes."

In addition to this use of *mataios* (or *euêthês*, or *stultus*) to describe the foolish "M" character, the endomythium can also point out the mistake itself, the folly, *matê*, which is dramatized in the fable's plot. So, for example, when an ox-driver's wagon gets stuck in a ravine, he prays to Hercules for help, and receives a visit from the god himself:<sup>30</sup>

Boêlatês hamaxan êgen ek kômês.  
tês d' empesousês eis pharagga kôilôdê,  
deon boêtheîn, autos argos heistêkei,  
tôi d' Hêraklei prosêukheth', hon monon pantôn  
theôn alêthôs prosekunei te k'atima.  
ho theos d' epistas eipe "tôn trokhôn haptou  
kai tous boas kentrize. tois theois d' eukhou  
hotan ti poiêis k'autos, ê matên euxêi."

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<sup>28</sup> Perry 18.

<sup>29</sup> Avianus 20 = Perry 18.

<sup>30</sup> Babrius 20 = Perry 291.

An ox-driver was bringing his wagon home from the village when it fell into a deep ravine. Instead of doing something about it, as the situation required, he stood by idly and prayed for help to Heracles, of all the gods the one whom he really worshipped and held in honor. Suddenly the god appeared in person beside him and said, "Take hold of the wheels and lay the whip on your oxen. Pray to the gods only when you are doing something to help yourself, or else you will pray in foolishness [*matên*]."

In this case, the "R" character, Heracles, rebukes the "M" character for the folly (*matê*) of his prayer.

The foolish mistake can also appear in the endomythium of an "R-not-M" type of fable, in which a character wisely corrects himself before making that foolish mistake, as in the story of the bull invited by the lion to a dinner which is in fact an ambush:<sup>31</sup>

Leôn taurôi pammegethei epibouleuôn eboulêthê dolôi autou perigenesthai. dioper probaton tethukenai phêsas eph' hestiasin auton ekalese, boulomenos kataklithenta auton katagônisasathai. ho de elthôn kai theasamenos lebêtas te pollous kai obeliskous megalous, to de probaton oudamou, mêden eipôn apêllatteto. tou de leontos aitiômenou auton kai tên aitian punthanomenu di' hên ouden deinon pathôn alogôs apeisin, ephê "all' egôge ou matên touto poiô: horô gar paraskeuên oukh hôs eis probaton, all' eis tauron hêtoimasmenên."

A lion who had his eye on a very large bull wanted to overcome him by trickery. Therefore, he said that he had slaughtered a sheep and invited the bull to the feast, intending to overpower him while he was lying down at dinner. But when the bull came and saw a lot of pots and great roasting spits but no sheep anywhere, he left without saying a word. When the lion complained and asked him why he was going off without a word of explanation although nothing had happened to him, the bull said, "But I am not about to do anything foolish [*all' egôge ou matên touto poiô*]. For I see here that what you are getting ready is not for a sheep, but rather for feasting on a bull."

The formula which the bull uses here is identical to the formulaic endomythium pronounced by the boar, simply changing the adverbial *mataiôs* to the nominal *matê*: *all' egôge ou mataiôs/matên touto poiô*.

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<sup>31</sup> Perry 143.

This vocabulary of the mistake can also be expressed in Greek with the words *anous* (witless, stupid) and *anoia* (senselessness, stupidity). Greek also supplies the elegant notion of *metanoia*, "understanding after the fact" (as we saw already in the Latin proverb, *malo accepro stultus sapit*). For an example of *anoia*, we can return to our friend the jackdaw who tried to imitate the eagle. In Babrius's version of the story, the jackdaw pronounces the endomythium of the story, accepting the justice of being punished for his own lack of intelligence:<sup>32</sup>

"dikên d' anoiês" eipen "axiôs tinô:  
ti gar ôn koloios aietous emimoumên:"

"It is right [axiôs] that I pay the penalty for my lack of intelligence [anoiês].  
For being a jackdaw, why should I have imitated the eagles?"

In another fable, a foolish wolf finally sheds his foolishness in a moment of understanding, which is designated as *metanoia* in the Greek text. Yet this moment of understanding arrives too late. By the time he realizes the nature of his mistake, the wolf is already being mauled to death by a lion. As in Phaedrus's story of the stag who learned the value of his legs too late ("*nunc demum intelligo!*"), the wolf's realization of his situation is able to produce a verbalization of the moral, but it is not able to rescue him from the consequences of his mistake:<sup>33</sup>

Lukos planômenos <pot'> en erêmois topoïis,  
klinontos êdê pros <kata> dusin hêliou,  
dolikhên heautou tên skian idôn ephê:  
"leont' egô dedoika, têlikoutos ôn;  
plethrou d' êkhôn to mêkos ou thêrôn haplôs

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<sup>32</sup> Babrius 137 = Perry 2, cited on p. 31.

<sup>33</sup> Perry 260.

pantôn dunastês athroôn genêsomai;"  
lukon de gaurôthenta karteros leôn  
<helôn> katêsthi': ho d' eboêse metanoôn:  
"oiêsis hêmin pêmatôn paraitia."

A wolf was wandering one day in desert places when the sun was setting and saw his own shadow extended at length, whereupon he said, "And am I to fear the lion, when I myself am so great? Being of such stature, will I not become the ruler of all the animals?" But a powerful lion seized the wolf as he was boasting, and prepared to devour him. The wolf shrieked as he correctly realized his situation [*metanoôn*]: "My self-conceit is the cause of my destruction."

Thus, the vocabulary of the Aesopic fable -- with its fools and foolishness, with its mistakes and rebukes -- reinforces the definition of the Aesopic fable which I proposed in the previous chapter: Aesopic fables are brief and witty exempla based on the punishment or prevention of a mistake.

### ***Morals Inside and Outside the Fables***

With this brief survey of just a few examples of Aesopic endomythia, I hope to have shown that the endomythium is an essential feature of the overall structure of the Aesopic fable, expressed with a formulaic rhetoric appropriate to the didactic form and function of the fables. These biting "last words" inside the fable are very similar to the punchline of a joke, signalling the end of the oral performance and also conveying the "point" of the whole story in the form of a comical insult which is both witty and abusive. Yet despite the fact that the Aesopic fable is regularly characterized by the presence of the endomythium, this "moral inside the story" has received almost no systematic attention in the modern scholarship devoted to the Aesopic fable. Despite the hallmark quality of the fables' "last words," Aesopic scholars have been reluctant to

recognize that these endomythia actually contain the irreducible core of the story's moral and that the endomythium was in fact the only moral that the Aesopic fable required for a successful oral performance. There is not even a standard term in the scholarly literature which can be used to identify the "endomythium," even though the major scholars of the Aesopic fable in this century could not help but observe its existence. Nojgaard refers to the *réplique finale*, the final reply of the fable; the Polish scholar Abramowska modifies Nojgaard slightly, and says instead *replika dotkliwa*, a wounding reply, thus highlighting the vicious quality of the endomythium;<sup>34</sup> Jedrkiewicz emphasizes the humorous quality of the endomythium by calling it *battuta finale*, the final wisecrack; Rodriguez-Adrados focuses on the finality of the endomythium, calling it the *cierre sarcástico* or *cierre irónico*, the sarcastic or ironic closing words of the fable; similarly, Holzberg refers to the fable's *Schlusswort*. Benjamin Perry, despite his life-long project to index and analyze the entire Aesopic corpus, stubbornly refused to come up with a term to describe these morals inside the stories:<sup>35</sup> he refers to "what one might call a punch line in the mouth of one of the actors," or "the dramatic and virtually gnomic ending of a fable," and he even concedes that "very often the most important thing is what the last speaker says." Yet despite his obvious awareness of the endomythium's existence, Perry never incorporated it into his formal analysis of the Aesopic corpus. I would argue that this failure is a quite logical consequence of Perry's

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<sup>34</sup> This is terminology that Abramowska first proposed in her work on Krasicki's fables (1972).

<sup>35</sup> The quotes are Perry 1962: 345, 1940: 398, and 1940: 399, respectively.

strictly literary interest in the fables. Like almost all the modern scholars working on Aesopic fables, Perry was hostile to the notion of the Aesopic fable as an oral genre and instead devoted his attention to a feature of the fable that is most indicative of its literary transmission: the promythia and epimythia that were added by the Greek prose editors and by the poets who transformed the traditional fables into written performances.

I would argue, however, that it is precisely the relationship between these morals "inside the story" and the morals "outside the story" that allows us to understand both the structure and function of the Aesopic fable. The endomythium is the characteristic form of the moral in the oral tradition of the Aesopic fable, while the promythia and epimythia have a clearly secondary character, serving primarily to translate the endomythium of the fable into an application outside the fable's frame of reference. As such, the endomythium is directed towards a character inside the story, while the promythium and epimythium are directed towards a character outside, that is, towards ourselves, the audience of the fable. In general, the fable is not engaged in a dialogic relationship with this audience outside the fable; the epimythia and promythia are usually spoken impersonally, in the third person, as opposed to the direct and incisive second person forms of address within the fable. Thus, while the endomythia regularly address the "M" character of the story as "you fool!," the epimythia instead speak of fools and foolishness without directly confronting the audience of the fable -- and certainly without addressing the reader of the fable as a fool.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Perry 19. The same vocabulary of the mistake used here, *esphalês*, is also found in the story of the fox and the locust in the previous chapter: in Syntipas 10 = Perry 408 (cited on p. 30), the fox tells the rabbit that he has made a great mistake getting into the

Alôpêx phragmon anabainousa, epeidê olisthainein emelle, batou epelabeto: xustheisa de to pelma kai deinôs diatetheisa êtiato autên, eige kataphugousêi ep' autên hôs epî boêthon kheiron autêi ekhrêsato kai autou tou prokeimenou. kai hê batos hupotukhousa eipen "all' esphalês tôn phrenôn, ô hautê, emou epilabesthai boulêtheisa, hêtis autê pantôn epilambanesthai eiôtha." Houtô kai tôn anthrôpôn mataioi eisin hosoi toutois hôs boêthois prospheugousin hois to adikein mallon estin emphuton.

A fox climbing over a wall felt herself slipping and caught at a thornbush. The thornbush scraped her paw and in severe pain the fox complained that when she had turned to it for help, she had received worse treatment than what she had tried to avoid. The thornbush replied, "But my dear, you made quite a mistake [esphalês tôn phrenôn] in deciding to grab at me, for I am the one who always grabs at others." The story shows that the same is true among men: they are fools [mataioi] who run for help to those who are born to act unfairly [to adikein mallon emphuton].

The thornbush tells the fox that she is a fool, but the epimythium turns this into an abstract, impersonal assessment of fools in general. Similarly, in the fable of the viper and the file, the word "simpleton" is used with considerable force in the endomythium, in contrast to the impersonal and colorless reference to foolish people in the epimythium:<sup>37</sup>

Ekhis eiselthôn eis khalkourgou ergastêrion para tôn skeuôn eranon êitei: labôn de par' autôn êke pros tēn rhinēn kai autēn parekalei dounai ti autôi. hê de hupotukhousa eipen "all' euêthês ei par' emou ti apoisesthai oiomenos, hêtis ou didonai, alla lambanein para pantôn eiôtha." Ho logos dêloi hoti mataioi eisin hoi para philargurôn ti kerdainein prosdokôntes.

A viper went into the shop of a smith and asked the tools to be given. When he had gotten something already he went then to the file and asked it to give him something too. But the file replied, "You are certainly a simpleton [euêthês] if you expect to get anything from me. It's my habit not to give but to take from everyone." The fable shows that those people who expect to make a profit from a miser [philarguros] are acting like fools [mataioi].

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well, *megalôs esphalês*.

<sup>37</sup> Perry 93.

In both of these stories, the "R" character has markedly undesirable qualities: the thornbush is grasping, and the file is greedy. The epimythia identify these undesirable qualities in abstract terms of moral opprobrium: the thornbush is a person who is born to act unfairly (*to adikein mallon emphuton*), and the file is a miser (*philarguros*). Yet despite the fact that these characters are morally negative, they are the "voice of the moral" inside the fable: in the contest between the fool and the bad character, the Aesopic fable gives the bad character the right to pass judgment on the fool. As a result, the endomythia of the fables acquire a sharp and biting quality which is lacking in the epimythium, where the voice of moral authority is diffused into an impersonal inventory of the good and the bad, the foolish and the wise. In general, the vocabulary of the Aesopic epimythia tends to be less negative than the endomythia found inside the fables: while the endomythia viciously ridicule the stupid or foolish mistake that has been made by a character in the fable, the epimythia are more likely to state the moral in positive terms. Rather than emphasizing the *marê*, the stupidity, which has been dramatized in the fable's negative exemplum, the epimythium prefers to translate the negative exemplum into a positive moral exhortation, often invoking *phronêsis*, wisdom, or *phronimoi*, wise men. So, for example, in the story of the fox and the goat in the well, the fox pronounces a witty and insulting endomythium at the stupid goat's expense, while the epimythium instead presents a positive lesson for wise men to consider:<sup>38</sup>

tou de tragou memphomenou autên hôs tas homologias parabainousan, epistrapheisa eipen "ô houtos, all' ei tosaútas phrenas eikhes hosas en tõi pógõni trikhas, ou proteron dê katabebêkeis prin ê tẽn anodon eskepsõ." Houtô kai tôn

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<sup>38</sup> Perry 9.



anthrôpôn tous phronimous dei proteron ta telê tôn pragmatôn skopein, eith' houtôs autois egkheirein.

When the goat complained that the fox was breaking their agreement, she turned around and said, "My good fellow, if your wits [*phrenas*] were as abundant as the hairs in your beard, you wouldn't have gotten down there before you thought about how you would get out." So too it is necessary for wise men [*tous phronimous*] to think in advance about the outcome of their deeds before they proceed to act on them.

The moral pronounced here by the fox fits perfectly within the model of the Aesopic fable as a negative exemplum: the goat has made a stupid mistake, which is mocked and abused in the fox's insulting endomythium.<sup>39</sup> The epimythium which is added to the story, however, is based on a positive interpretation of the negative exemplum that was illustrated by the actual story: the goat may have been stupid, but wise men (*phronimoi*) realize in advance the dangers that they might have to confront (that is, they act like the goat in that other story: the one who decided not to yield to the invitations of the lion or the wolf<sup>40</sup>). The epimythium thus tends to reorient the negative exemplum of the fable towards a positive point of view. This contrast between the witty and slightly wicked endomythium and the comparatively dull and pious epimythium probably explains Daly's decision to publish his "Aesop without morals," which is to say "Aesop without the epimythia." The epimythia are simply not very funny; in fact, they tend to neutralize, and even flatten, the witty humiliation of the foolish characters inside the

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<sup>39</sup> The fool, *aphron*, is immortalized in the earliest extant Aesopic fable in Greek, Hesiod's fable of the hawk and the nightingale in *Works and Days* (= Perry 4), in which the hawk mocks the nightingale for being a fool, *aphron*. For a discussion of the ancient and modern debates about the interpretation of Hesiod's use of this fable, see van Dijk (1997: 443-459).

<sup>40</sup> Perry 157, cited on p. ?.

fables. The epimythium translates the moral of the story into a model of positive behavior. yet the importance and prominence of the epimythium does not change the fact that the endomymthium can also rightly claim to be the "moral" of the fable, playing an essential role in the original form and function of the Aesopic fable as a popular oral genre of ritual invective.

### ***The Riddle of the Fable***

In addition to "neutralizing" the moral discomfort of the fable by redefining the fable's narrative conflict into impersonal and abstract terms, the epimythia and promythia also serve another important function: they translate the enigmatic terms of the fable's fictional world into more abstract but also more literal terms that are suited to human society. So, for example, in the fable about the thornbush and the fox, the thornbush is interpreted as someone who acts unfairly; in the fable of the viper and the file, the file is identified as a miser. The world of the fable, in which thornbushes and files speak and act like human beings, functions very much like a riddle, an encoded message that has to be "decoded" in terms that are applicable outside the fable's world. The promythium and epimythium decode the fable's message, providing a solution to the enigmatic moral as it is expressed by means of the endomymthium.

This link between fables and riddles is perfectly captured in the Greek word *ainos*<sup>41</sup> which could mean both "fable" and "riddle:"<sup>42</sup> just like riddles, fables also

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<sup>41</sup> Nagy's comments on *ainos* throughout *Pindar's Homer* are extremely relevant here, in particular his definition of *ainos* in terms of audience (see especially 148-149). For the word *ainos* in the world of the fable, see van Dijk's comments (1997: 79-82).

contain a hidden meaning. The revelation of the hidden meaning can be described in Greek with the word, *lusis*, solution, a term which is used in some Greek prose fable collections to describe the epimythium of the fable, as if the fable were a riddle to be solved. Moreover, *ainos* could also be used to mean "proverb."<sup>43</sup> Not surprisingly, then, Aesop was famed in antiquity not only as the author of "Aesopic fables," but also of "Aesopic proverbs."<sup>44</sup> These Aesopic proverbs are in some sense like free-standing endomythia: they are enigmatic pieces of advice which often imply an unstated story.<sup>45</sup>

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The use of the word *ainos* to mean "fable" is most firmly established in the archaic period (van Dijk 80), but there are still numerous examples of the word *ainos* used by the rhetoricians (for a list, see van Dijk 80-81).

<sup>42</sup> The Greek word *ainigma* shares the same root as *ainos*. For *ainigma* and *ainissomia* see van Dijk 1997: 81.

<sup>43</sup> As Archer Taylor already observed (1985: 27), "the relation of the fable and the proverb is particularly close, and not all nations have regarded them as distinct forms: the Greek *ainos* means both fable and proverb. So also the Aramaic-Syriac *mathla* and the related Hebrew *mashal* as well as the Old English *gied*. We are not well informed about the process of making fables into proverbs." Indeed, it is clear also that proverbs could provoke the making of fables, at least in the literary tradition. Consider, for example, Phaedrus's rather inept response to *onos luras* in Appendix 14 (= Perry 542): the donkey finds a lyre and fails in his effort to play it. For a series of essays on the complex relationship between fables and proverbs, see Carnes (1988).

<sup>44</sup> This connection was not lost on the ancients. For example, the scholia to Hesiod's fable of the hawk and the nightingale (= Perry 4) describes the fable as a "proverbial story": *ainos ho paroimiodês logos* (cited in van Dijk, 1997: 436). In a modern context, it is worth noting that the fables of Uncle Remus collected by Joel Chandler Harris were also published with "sayings" attributed to Uncle Remus, filling several pages (1986).

<sup>45</sup> The space provided by the promythia of the fables was later appropriated by translators of Aesop in order to insert vernacular proverbs from their native traditions into the imported Aesopic fables. This process goes back at least to Biernat of Lublin's Polish *Ezop* (see Gruchala's recent edition, 1997). The practice continues today, as in Handford's English translation of the Aesopic fables (1956), which he titles with English proverbs and clichés like "share and share alike," "a mountain out of a molehill," "familiarity breeds contempt" are assigned as titles to the traditional fables.

Moreover, because these proverbs are expressed in figurative language they require a *lusi*, a "solution" in literal terms, something very much like the promythia or epimythia of the fables. In one of the Greek collections of Aesopic proverbs, for example, each proverb is followed by an explanation in metrical form (dodecasyllables), a *hermêneia* which serves precisely the same function as the epimythia appended to the Aesopic fables:<sup>46</sup>

Ophis to derma apoduetai, tên gnômên de oudamôs.

***Hermêneia.***

Kakourgos anêr, tous tropous ouk ameibôn,  
To skhêma metallassei apatês kharin.

The snake casts off his skin, but never his plans. ***Explanation:*** An evil-doer, while not changing his bad habits, can alter his form in order to deceive [*apatês kharin*].

Podas ekhôn <su> kai podagras elpize.

***Hermêneia.***

Hepetai pantôs tois terpnois ta lupêra,  
Ei mê pou Tukhê summakhos parastatei.

Having feet [*podas*], you can expect to get gout [*podagras*]. ***Explanation:*** Painful things always accompany delights, wherever Luck [*Tukhê*] does not stand by as an ally.

Sigêros potamos kata gên bathus.

***Hermêneia.***

Anêr kakourgos praos tois pelas phaneis  
Kekrummenêi kakiai tous dolous ekhei.

A silent river has a deep bed. ***Explanation:*** An evil-doer seems gentle from up close, but in his concealed wickedness he is full of wiles [*dolous*].

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<sup>46</sup> Proverbs 1.6, 1.22, 1.35, and 1.67 in Perry's *Aesopica*. Admittedly, not all of the proverbs in the "Aesopic" collections are figurative proverbs, but all the proverbs in this collection do come equipped with a *hermêneia*, whether they are originally expressed in figurative language or not.

Kuôn speudousa tuphla gennai.

***Hermêneia.***

Phusis hêper pephuken kai kairôi nemei,  
Takhutêti de prattomenê sumphoras nemei.

The bitch in a hurry gives birth to blind pups. ***Explanation:*** While Nature bears and delivers at the appropriate time, that which is done in swiftness delivers disaster [*sumphoras*].

This last example exposes the close connection between the world of Aesopic fables and proverbs, because there is also an Aesopic fable based on this same motif of the "blind puppies." The fable version, however, comes with a typically Aesopic plot in which the bitch not only gives birth to blind puppies but foolishly boasts about her abilities, provoking a sow to insult and humiliate her:<sup>47</sup>

Hus kai kuôn peri eutokias êrizon. tês de kunos eipousês hoti monê tôn tetrapodôn takheôs apokuei, hê hus hupotukhousa ephê "all' hotan touto legêis, ginôske hoti tuphla tikteis." Ho logos dêloi hoti ouk en tôi takhei ta pragmata, all' en têi teleiotêti krinetai.

A sow and a bitch were arguing about how easily they bore their young. The bitch said that she was the only four-footed creature that brought forth her offspring so quickly. The sow replied, "Yes, but when you say this, you must realize that they are still blind when you give birth to them." The story shows that accomplishments are not judged by speed but by their completeness.

The proverbial motif of the bitch giving birth to blind puppies has thus been transformed into an "M-versus-R" type of Aesopic fable, in which the sow ("R") rebukes the foolish bitch ("M") for boasting about something which is, in fact, a source of shame.

***Shifting Epimythia***

The endomythium of a fable is located firmly in the world of the fable, making

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<sup>47</sup> Perry 223.

an oblique and enigmatic comment on the audience's world outside the fable. The epimythium, on the other hand, makes an explicit connection between the figurative world of the Aesopic fable and the social situation in which that fable is located. As such, the morals of the fables constitute a kind of window onto the obsessions of a society. Aesopic fables distinguish between desirable and undesirable behaviors in a fictitious animal world, and the epimythia that are attached to the fables thus provide a kind of inventory of the desirable and undesirable behaviors in actual human society.<sup>48</sup> The epimythia of Aesopic fables shift as the fables move from society to society, reflecting the changing expectations of that society projected onto the unchanging surface of the fable's figurative language. If we consider the Aesopic fables as "masks" for the issues and concerns that occupy a given society or social group, then the epimythia present those issues and concerns "unmasked."

To a great extent, the historical success of the Aesopic fable in European literature has to do with the fact that these ancient fables could be equipped with new epimythia over and over again, adapting the same old fables to the immediate concerns of each particular society. In Chapters 4 and 5, I will consider in detail the issues that arose from the need to "Christianize" the Aesopic fables. Yet even in secular traditions, the Aesopic fables have been subjected to different lines of interpretation, as we can see by comparing the epimythia of the ancient Aesopic fables with the epimythia found, for example, in the twelfth-century French fables of Marie de France. As has often been

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<sup>48</sup> Much the same argument can be made for the interpretive value of the way in which Artemidorus "decodes" figurative dreams in his *Oneirocritica*.

noted,<sup>49</sup> Marie de France's fables tend to focus on conflicts between social classes in medieval Europe, as opposed to the epimythia of the Greek prose fables which regularly focused on the personal qualities of individuals. Consider, for example, the story of the foolish frogs who rejoiced at the wedding of the sun in the Greek prose version:<sup>50</sup>

Gamoi tou Hêliou therous eaignonto: panta de ta zôia ekhairon epi toutôi, êgallonto de kai hoi batrakhoi. Eis de toutôn eipen: "ô môroi, ei sti agallesthe: ei gar monos ôn ho Hêlios pasan ilun apoxêrainei, ei gêmas homoion autôi paidion gennêsei, ti ou pathômen kakon:" Hoti polloi tôn to phronêma kouphoteron ekhontôn khairousin epi pragmasin tois mê kharan ekhousin.

The wedding of Sun was taking place in the summer; all the animals were delighted at the event, and the frogs were also rejoicing. But one of the frogs said to his fellows: "O you fools [môroi]! If all by himself the Sun is already able to dry up all our swamp, what will happen if he marries and produces a son like himself, what sort of evil would we not then endure?" The fable shows that many people of with very obtuse intelligence [*to phronêma kouphoteron*] rejoice at events which have no joy in store for them.

The epimythium of the Greek prose version refers to stupid people in general, rather than any particular social group, as does Babrius's version of the story:<sup>51</sup>

Khairousi polloi tôn huperbolêi kouphôn  
eph' hois again mellousin oukhi khairêsein.

There are many people who are so exceedingly obtuse [*kouphôn*] that they rejoice in things which they are bound to not rejoice in afterwards.

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<sup>49</sup> See the discussion in Spiegel's translation of Marie's fables (1987), with additional bibliography cited there.

<sup>50</sup> Perry 314.

<sup>51</sup> Babrius 24 = Perry 314. For the purposes of my argument here, it does not matter whether Babrius himself was the author of the epimythia or not; nor does it matter whether the Greek prose version is an epitome of Babrius rather than the other way around. The fact that both versions of the story follow the same strategy in the epimythium show the viability of this interpretive strategy for at least one Greek author sometime around the second century C.E.

In Marie de France's version of the wedding story, however, the epimythium is not concerned with the specific balance of power that exists between the animals on the earth and the sovereign Sun in the heavens, a sovereign who poses a great threat to his subjects, and whose power must somehow be kept within limits. The fable is not just about foolish people in general, but about a particular class of people who find themselves in a specific power relationship with "*les seignurs*":<sup>52</sup>

Issi chastie les plusurs  
Qui sur eus unt les maus seignurs,  
Que pas enes deivent esforcier  
N'a plus fort de eus acumpainer  
Par lur sen ne par lur avoir,  
Mes desturber a lur poeir.  
Cum plus est fort, pis lur fet:  
Tuz jurs lur est en mal aguet.

Thus everyone should cautioned be / When under evil sovereignty: / Their lord must not grow mightier / Nor join with one superior / To them in intellect or riches. / They must do all they can to thwart this. / Stronger the lord, the worse their fate: / His ambush always lies in wait.

Although the Greek versions of the fable also recount the terrible threat that the Sun poses to the frogs, this threat is not a focal point of the Greek epimythia: the admonition of the wise frog is interpreted as a critique of the foolish other frogs, without dwelling on the danger posed by the Sun, or providing a literal interpretation of the "figure" of the Sun. Yet in Marie de France, the force of the moral depends precisely on a correct interpretation of the Sun as a dangerous sovereign: Marie dwells on the perilous qualities of the ruler in order to provoke the class of people who are ruled by the Sun to unite in

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<sup>52</sup> Marie de France 6 (English translation by Harriet Spiegel) = Perry 314. Marie does not actually tell the story about frogs, but instead about the animal community, "*les creatures*" who "*s'assemblerent*" to debate their attitude towards the marriage of the Sun.



their own self-interest and to guard against their Lord's alliance with other threatening forces.

Like the Greek prose version, Phaedrus also narrates this story as an actual public performance in which Aesop himself is the story-teller:<sup>53</sup>

Vicini furis celebres vidit nuptias  
Aesopus, et continuo narrare incipit:  
Uxorem quondam Sol cum vellet ducere,  
clamorem ranae sustulere ad sidera.  
convicio permotus quaerit Iuppiter  
causam querellae. quaedam tum stagni incola  
"Nunc" inquit "omnes unus exurit lacus.  
cogitque miseras arida sede emori.  
quidnam futurum est si crearit liberos?"

When Aesop saw the crowded wedding celebration of his neighbor, a thief, he immediately told the following story: Once upon a time, when the Sun wanted to get married, the frogs raised a cry of protest up to the stars, and Jupiter, disturbed by their shouting, asked the reason for their complaint, whereupon a certain inhabitant of the swamp said, "Already one Sun is enough to burn up all the ponds, driving us to a miserable death in our dried up home. What then will become of us if he will have sons of his own?"

By providing us with this fictional account of the performance of an Aesopic fable, Phaedrus gives us a precious glimpse into how the Aesopic fable might have functioned in its original form as a genre of oral performance. Unlike the Greek prose version, Phaedrus does not add an epimythium to the story to explain its meaning. Instead, he actually shows us an example of the fable's application to a particular social situation. Aesop tells the fable specifically in relation to the foolish rejoicing of his neighbors at the wedding of the village thief (no doubt an opulent wedding, to which everyone flocked for the food and drink, without thinking about the wedding's long-term consequences). The

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<sup>53</sup> Phaedrus 1.6 = Perry 314.

link between the fable and its application is ingeniously figurative and literal at one and the same time: literally about a wedding in both cases, but figuratively about a thief disguised as the "sun" who dries up his neighboring environs. With this elegant application of the story to a real-life situation, Aesop (in Phaedrus's imaginary scenario) provides us with a truly elegant telling of the story: Aesopic fables function best as an actual performance, exploiting the fable's potential to comment on a real-life situation from the figurative space of the fable's fictional world. Phaedrus "stages" several of these Aesopic performances in his collected fables, showing us how a fable could be applied to a local setting. In some cases, it is a public situation, as in this story of Aesop at the thief's wedding, and also when Aesop tells the fable of the frogs and their king in response to the Athenians' complaints about Pisistratus.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, in the prologue to his third book of poems, Phaedrus makes a connection between Aesop's status as a slave and the rhetorical strategy of the fable's figurative language:<sup>55</sup>

nunc, fabularum cur sit inventum genus,  
brevi docebo. servitus obnoxia,  
quia quae volebat non audebat dicere,  
adfectus proprios in fabellas transtuli  
calumniamque fictis elusit iocis.

Now I will briefly explain why this type of story was invented. The vulnerable condition of the slave [*servitus obnoxia*], because it did not dare to say what it wanted, transferred its true feelings into the fables, and evaded prosecution by relying on fictitious witticisms [*fictis iocis*].

The figurative language of the Aesopic fable is meant not only to reveal but also to

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<sup>54</sup> Phaedrus 1.2 = Perry 44.

<sup>55</sup> Phaedrus 3.33-37.

conceal, cloaking the teller of the story in a protective kind of ambiguity that allows him to disown any dangerous implications of the fable he has told.<sup>56</sup> So, for example, in telling a story about the Sun and the frogs, Aesop has not (literally) said anything negative about the thief. In such a precarious situation, the performance of the Aesopic fable relies entirely on the figurative endomythium to convey its meaning; the entire point of telling this kind of fable resides in the audience decoding the message accurately based on the hints provided by the storyteller, without an explicit promythium or epimythium.

While Phaedrus shows Aesop performing fables on several occasions, the legendary *Life of Aesop* provides surprisingly few examples of Aesop using Aesopic fables to evade the censure of his master. Rather than hiding himself in figurative language, this Aesop prefers a rather different style of evasive speech, relentlessly interpreting his master's speech in an absurdly literal fashion. he thus thwarts his master's wishes by a scrupulous obedience to the master's every word. So, for example, when being interrogated by his future master at a slave auction, Aesop evades the questions by answering them literally:<sup>57</sup>

pros auton legei "potapos ei;" ho de, "Sarkinos." kai ho Xanthos: "hou touto legô, alla pou egennêthês;" "en têi koiliai tên mêtros mou," ephê. "ou touto erôtô, alla poiôi topôi egennêthês;" kai ho Aisôpos: "ouk anêggeile moi hê mêtêr mou poteron en koitôni ê en triklinôi."

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<sup>56</sup> On Aesopic language used in response to censorship, see Loseff (1984) and Abramowska (1991).

<sup>57</sup> Vita W 25. Compare an identical scene of evasion in Plautus's *Persa* when the daughter of the parasite, disguised as a slave for auction, evades the pimp's questions by answering them literally (lines 630 ff.): Dordalus: *ubi tu nata es?* / Virgo: *ut mihi mater dixit, in culina, in angulo ad laevam manum.*

Xanthus said: Where do you come from? / Aesop said: From the flesh. / Xanthus said: That's not what I mean. Where were you born? / Aesop said: In my mother's belly. / Xanthus said: But that's not what I'm asking you, but in what place were you born? / Aesop said: My mother didn't tell me whether it was in the bedroom or in the dining room.

In this case, Aesop's obstinate reliance on literal speech produces an effect similar to the use of figurative language in the fables. When Aesop is on the auction block he cloaks his aggressive non-response in what seems to be a servile obedience to the literal meaning of his master's words; likewise, in telling fables, Aesop cloaks his criticism of his circumstances in figurative language that has no literal connection to those circumstances.

Yet while there are not many scenes in the *Life of Aesop* when Aesop uses figurative speech in this evasive fashion, there is one pivotal scene in which this strategy is evident: Aesop relies on enigmatic language to make an oblique attack on King Croesus, disguising his protest with an allegorical tale.<sup>38</sup>

ho de Aisôpos legei autois "andres Samioi, tôn prôtopolitôn humôn dedôkotôn gnômên khorêgein tôi basilei telos, emou punthanesthe poteron <dounai dei ê mê;> ean eipô mê dote, ekhthron emauton epideixô basilei Kroisôi." hoi de okhloi anakraugasan "gnômên dos." ho de Aisôpos ephê "gnômên men ou dôsô, logôi de tini lexô humin. tou Dios keleusantos pote, tois anthrôpois hupedeixen ho Promêtheus hodous duo, mian eleutherias kai mian douleias. kai tên men tês eleutherias hodon epoiêsen en arkhaïs trakheian kai dusekbaton kai apokrêmnon kai anudron, tribolôn te gemousan, holên epikindunon, to de telos pedion homalon, peripatous ekhousan, karpôn gemousan alsei, enudron, hina to tês kakopatheias elthêi eis anapausin telos ekhousan. tên de tês douleias hodon epoiêsen kat' arkhas pedion homalon, euanthê kai hêdeian prosopsin ekhousan kai pollên truphên, to de telos autês dusekbaton, holon sklêron kai krêmnodes." epignontes de hoi Samioi to sumpheron ek tôn tou Aisôpou logôn homothumadon anephônêsan tôi grammatêphorôi legontes tên traxkheian hodon.

Aesop said to them, "Men of Samos, when your first citizens have given you the opinion that you should pay the tax to the king, do you ask me whether you

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<sup>38</sup> Perry 383.

should give it or not? If I say, 'Don't give it,' I'll mark myself as an enemy to King Croesus." But the crowd shouted, "Give us your opinion." Aesop said, "I will not give you advice but will speak in a fable [*logôî de tini lexô humin*]. Once, at the command of Zeus, Prometheus described to men two ways, one the way of freedom, and the other that of slavery. The way of freedom he pictured as rough at the beginning, narrow, steep, and waterless, full of brambles, and beset with perils everywhere, but finally a level plain amid parks, groves of fruit trees, and water courses where the struggle reaches its end in rest. The way of slavery he pictured as a level plain at the beginning, flowery and pleasant to look upon with much to delight but at its end, narrow, hard, and like a cliff." The Samians recognized from what Aesop said where their interest lay and shouted with one accord to the emissary that they would take the rough road.

While this scene does show Aesop using figurative language in order to make a veiled protest against the demands of a powerful adversary, the story that he tells here is not an Aesopic fable: that is, this story of the two ways is not a "brief and witty exemplum based on the punishment or prevention of a mistake." It is not really a story at all, in fact, but an allegorical emblem. As such, this story from the *Life of Aesop* does not appear in the ancient collections of Aesopic fables.

## **Part Two. The Belly and The Members: A Fable of the People**

Phaedrus's explanation of the fable's origins in *servitus obnoxia* is clearly relevant to some very important aspects of the Aesopic fable and its reliance on figurative language for evasive purposes. At the same time, however, it would be a mistake to tie the fortunes of the Aesopic fable completely to the institution of slavery and to the figure of Aesop, the slave hero celebrated in the *Life of Aesop*.<sup>39</sup> It is surely no accident, for

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<sup>39</sup> Jedrkiewicz's *Sapere e paradosso* provides a thorough review of the evidence for the figure of Aesop in ancient literature (1989), including a careful analysis of the authors who put special emphasis on Aesop's status as a slave (e.g., Phaedrus), as opposed to those authors who seem indifferent to this element of the Aesop legend (e.g., Aristotle).

example, that Aesop is largely invisible in the prose collections of Greek fables, and that he is also absent from the fables told by Babrius (Babrius makes only fleeting reference to Aesop in the prologue to his fables, and does not even mention Aesop's supposed status as a slave).<sup>60</sup> Moreover, the anecdote about Demades's use of the Aesopic fable to rebuke his audience<sup>61</sup> shows that the Aesopic fable was by no means confined to *servitus obnoxia*. The oldest attested performance of a fable in Roman culture can give us yet another perspective on the form and function of the Aesopic fable, and specifically its association with political aristocracy. When the Roman Senate sends Menenius Agrippa to persuade the plebs of Rome to return to the city, he speaks to them -- from his position as a member of the elite -- by means of an Aesopic fable, the story of "the belly and the members."<sup>62</sup> It is Livy who provides the first written account of this event.<sup>63</sup>

Placuit igitur oratorem ad plebem mitti Menenium Agrippam, facundum virum et (quod inde oriundus erat) plebi carum. Is intromissus in castra prisco illo dicendi

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<sup>60</sup> After describing a Golden Age, in which trees and fish and animals talked with the human inhabitants of the world, Babrius explains (Prologue: 14-16): "you may learn and understand that this was the situation from the wise old man Aesop, who has expounded fables (*muthous*) to us in prose (*tês eleutherês mousês*)."

<sup>61</sup> Perry 63, cited on p. 1.

<sup>62</sup> Compare Schwarzbaum (1979: xlv, n. 53) for the similar use of a fable as recounted in the *Genesis Rabbah* 64.10: Rabbi Joshua Ben Hananiah "succeeded in pacifying the enraged Jewish Assembly by means of a fable, just as the well-known Menenius Agrippa availed himself of an old Egyptian fable, which he employed as an effective political weapon." Rodriguez-Adrados also argues for the Egyptian origins of this fable (1987: I.344), as did Jacobs (see bibliography in 1889: I.247), but the parallel is extremely tenuous. It seems to me just as likely that the motif could have been native to archaic Roman folk culture, with no particular connection to Egyptian folklore.

<sup>63</sup> Livy, 2.32 = Perry 130.

et horrido modo nihil aliud quam hoc narrasse fertur: Tempore quo in homine non (ut nunc) omnia in unum consentiant, sed singulis membris suum cuique consilium, suus sermo fuerit indignatas reliquas partes sua cura, suo labore ac ministerio ventri omnia quaeri, ventrem in medio quietum nihil aliud quam datis voluptatibus frui; conspirasse inde ne manus ad os cibum ferrent, nec os acciperet datum, nec dentes quae acciperent conficerent. Hac ira, dum ventrem fame domare vellent, ipsa una membra totumque corpus ad extremam tabem venisse. Inde apparuisse ventris quoque haud segne ministerium esse, nec magis ali quam alere eum, reddentem in omnes corporis partes hunc quo vivimus vigemusque, divisum pariter in venas, maturum confecto cibo sanguinem. Comparando hinc quam intestina corporis seditio similis esset irae plebis in patres, flexisse mentes hominum.

The Senate therefore decided that the orator Menenius Agrippa should be sent to the plebs, a talented speaker and dear to the plebs because he himself was of plebeian origin. Having been sent into the plebs' camp, he is said to have narrated in that old-fashioned and disagreeable style of speaking [*prisco illo dicendi et horrido modo*] precisely the following story: At that time when all the parts of the human body did not function in unison (as is the case now), but rather each member of the body had its own opinion and was able to speak, it happened that the stomach provoked the wrath of the other members of the body, and they complained about the worry and work and attention which they had to devote to the stomach which simply sat in their midst, fully at ease and doing nothing other than enjoying the pleasures which were offered to it; wherefore there was a revolt, with the hands refusing to bear food to the mouth, and the mouth refusing to take anything it was offered, and the teeth refusing to chew anything they were offered. As a result of this protest, when they wanted to subdue the stomach with hunger, the members themselves and the entire body began to waste away completely. Hence it was clear that the work done by the stomach was no by no means trivial, and that it was not so much nourished by the body but rather itself nourished the body, giving back into all the parts of the body that blood which allows us to live and flourish, as the stomach shares it equally through the veins, having made the blood ready with the food that the stomach digested. By thus comparing the internal protest of the body, showing how it was similar to the anger of the plebs against the Senate, he was able to change the men's mind.

Clearly, this story of the belly and the members falls under the rubric of an Aesopic fable: unlike Aesop's allegory of the two roads as told to the Samians, Menenius tells the plebs a story that is precisely "a brief and witty exemplum based on the punishment of a mistake." Of course, Livy does not revel in the wittiness of the story; instead, he

seems rather unimpressed with Menenius Agrippa's recourse to *prisco et horrido modo dicendi*. Yet even if Livy does not revel in the humor of the story, it is still possible to smile as we read it, especially the description of the hands refusing to work, the mouth refusing to open, and the teeth that refuse to chew (the implication apparently being that some other hands could bring food to the mouth, and the mouth could be forcibly opened, but even so the teeth would refuse to chew). This negative exemplum culminates in an appropriately catastrophic conclusion: the body wastes away and perishes because of the foolishness of the willful members.

Yet even though we are dealing here with a recognizably Aesopic fable, something vital is obviously missing: the endomythium. Although Livy provides us with a report of the epimythium which Menenius Agrippa supposedly delivered to the plebs, there is no "moral inside the story." In other words, the belly does not rebuke the members for having brought destruction down upon them all, nor do the members gasp out some desperate "last words" in which they abuse themselves for their error. The absence of the endomythium is, in fact, a common feature of Aesopic fables that are transmitted in written form: although the endomythium seems to have constituted the climax of the fable's oral performance, the endomythium becomes less vital in a written context, especially when the fable is equipped with a promythium or epimythium. In Phaedrus's poems, for example (as we will see in Chapter 3), the epimythium and promythium begin systematically to supplant the endomythium as the main focal point of the fable's rhetorical energy.

Of course, when the Aesopic fable loses its endomythium, it also loses a great



deal of its humorous appeal because the endomythium is the punchline of the fable, a focal point of the fable's humorous energy. The lack of an endomythium dramatically changes the "feel" of the fable. To see clearly this contrast between fables with an endomythium and fables from which the endomythium has been removed, we can compare Livy's version of the belly and the members with the version of the story preserved in the Greek prose Aesop, where the story now concerns a quarrel between the belly and the feet:<sup>64</sup>

Koilia kai podes peri dunameôs êrizon. par' hekasta de tôn podôn legontôn hoti tosouton proekhousi têi iskui hôs kai autên tên gastera bastazein, ekeinê apekrinato "all', ô houtoi, ean mê egô trophên proslabômai, ouden humeis bastazein dunasthe." Houtô kai epi tôn strateumatôn mêden esti to polu plêthos, ean mê hoi stratêgoi arista phronôsin.

The stomach and the feet were arguing about their strength, and when the feet kept on insisting that they were so much more powerful that they even carried the stomach around, the stomach replied: "Say what you will, but if I didn't get any food, you wouldn't have the strength to carry anything around." The same is true of armies: a great number means nothing if the generals do not use their wits well [*ean mê hoi stratêgoi arista phronôsin*].

In this case, the endomythium pronounced by the stomach actually takes the place of the plot as found in Livy: instead of dramatizing the catastrophic effects that result from the corporal strike, this version of the Aesopic fable instead depends upon the verbal rebuke of the endomythium -- and *only* the endomythium -- to convey the message of the fable.<sup>65</sup> The verbal force of the endomythium in the Greek prose version of the story

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<sup>64</sup> Perry 130.

<sup>65</sup> When the endomythium is almost the exclusive focus of the fable, it turns into what could be called a "Wellerism," named after Sam Weller in Dickens' *Pickwick Papers*. For a lengthy discussion, see Taylor (1985: 200-220), who includes some Greek and Latin examples, such as Quintilian 5.11.21: *paroimias genus illud, quod est velut*

is so strong that it obviates the need for a plot, and the stomach's vituperative outburst is itself able to provide the fable's narrative climax.

In addition, it is also worth noting a difference here between the epimythium of the Greek prose version and the historical setting presented in Livy. In both cases, the situation of the "belly and the members" is interpreted in strictly hierarchical terms: the belly is the ruling member, equivalent either to the generals of the army or to the Senate of Rome, while the rest of the body is in a subordinate position, equivalent to the plebs in Livy, or to the soldiers (perhaps the "foot-soldiers") in the Greek story of the belly and the feet. Yet there is a strange detail in the Greek epimythium, which is different from the version in Livy. In this moral, the behavior of the belly is interpreted in terms of wisdom, *phronêsis*, and nothing is said about the foolish behavior of the feet:

Houtô kai epi tôn strateumatôn mēden esti to polu plēthos, ean mē hoi stratēgoi arista phronōsin.

It is the same in the case of armies: a great number is not enough, unless the generals make the wisest possible decisions [*ean mē hoi stratēgoi arista phronōsin*].

The negative insult of the endomythium emerges unexpectedly in the form of a positive exhortation in the epimythium. In the endomythium, the belly makes fun of the feet for their foolish revolt, while the epimythium instead praises the generals of the army for acting wisely and thus bringing order to the masses of foot-soldiers. We are thus dealing here with an epimythium that inverts the force of the Aesopic plot and its endomythium. The editor of the prose collection has attempted to impose a kind of decorum on the

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*fabella brevior et per allegoriam accipitur: "non nostrum," inquit, "onus," bos clitellas* (for a discussion of this passage in Quintilian, see van Dijk, 1997: 46 n.43).

fable, a moralizing style that is completely opposite to the endomythium preserved in the body of the fable itself.

There is yet another version of this same fable in Plutarch's life of Coriolanus. Like Livy, Plutarch omits the endomythium and focuses instead on the epimythium pronounced by Menenius Agrippa:<sup>66</sup>

ephê gar tou anthrôpou ta melê panta pros tèn gastera stasiasai, kai katêgorein autês hôs monês argou kai asumbolou kathezomenês en tôi sômati, tôn d' allôn eis tas ekeinês orexeis ponous te megalous kai leitourgias hupomenontôn: tèn de gastera tês euêtheias autôn katagelan, agnoountôn hoti tèn trophên hupolambanei men eis heautên hapasan, anapempei d' authis ex hautês kai dianemei tois allois. "houtôs oun," ephê, "kai tês sugklêtou logos estin, ô politai, pros humas: ta gar ekei tugkhanonta tês prosêkousês epimeleias kai oikonomias bouleumata kai pragmata pasin humin epipherei kai dianemei to khrêsimon kai ôphelimon."

Menenius Agrippa said that all the parts of the human body staged a revolt against the stomach. They accused it of being the only lazy member of the body, not paying its share, and just sitting there, while the others suffered great hardships and public obligations to satisfy the stomach's appetites. But the stomach scoffed at their foolishness [*tês euêtheias autôn katagelan*] in not understanding that while the stomach did take in all the body's nourishment, it also sent that nourishment back out and shared it with the others. "That is how it is, citizens," he said, "in the matter of the Senate regarding you. For there the plans and affairs receive due care and management, and bring to you all a share of what is useful and helpful."

There is, however, a single word here in Plutarch's account -- *katagelan* -- which provides a trace of the witty derision that characterized the popular Aesopic tradition: confronted by the foolishness of the protesting members, the stomach does not get angry but instead laughs derisively, *katagelan*.<sup>67</sup> Plutarch's reference to the stomach's laughter

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<sup>66</sup> Plutarch, *Coriolanus* 6.

<sup>67</sup> In the Greek corpus, see Perry 232, the fox who falls into the river is laughed at (*katageloses*); Perry 294, where the peacock makes fun of a crane (*katagela*); Perry 150, where the lion mocks the mouse (*katagelasas*), and Perry 358, about a donkey who

suggests a version like the Greek prose fable (setting aside the epimythium added by the editor) in which the stomach's endomythium actually constituted the culmination of the fable's plot. Indeed, unlike Livy, Plutarch does not tell a story about the revolt of the body's members and its fatal outcome. Instead, Plutarch's version of the fable culminates in the stomach making fun of the foolish pretensions of the feet, even if the actual words of the stomach's endomythium are not reported in the text.

The endomythium that is thus implicit in Plutarch's version was restored by his English translator, Sir Thomas North, who does allow the stomach to pronounce the endomythium in his version of the story:

On a time all the members of man's body did rebel against the belly, complaining of it that it only remained in the midst of the body, without doing anything, neither did bear any labor to the maintenance of the rest, whereas all other parts and members did labor painfully and was very careful to satisfy the appetites and desires of the belly. And so the belly, all this notwithstanding, laughed at their folly and said, "It is true, I first receive all meats that nourish man's body; but afterwards I send it again to the nourishment of other parts of the same." "Even so," quoth he, "O you, my masters and citizens of Rome, the reason is alike between the senate and you. For matters being well digested, and their counsels thoroughly examined, touching the benefit of the commonwealth, the senators are cause of the common commodite that cometh unto every one of you."

In a marked departure from Plutarch's use of indirect discourse, North's version reports the stomach's endomythium as direct speech, side by side with Menenius Agrippa's epimythium. At the conclusion of this chapter I will show how North's vivid version of

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imitates a lion and is ridiculed (*katagelasthês*). Phaedrus's fables are strongly characterized by derision: 1.11 (Perry 151) *notis est derisui*; 1.25 (Perry 482), *deridentur* turpiter; 2.5 (Perry 489), *iactans officium comes, sed deridetur*; 3.6 (Perry 498), *hac derideri fabula merito potest*; 3.14 (Perry 505), *quod sensit simul derisor potius quam deridendus senex*; 3.18 (Perry 509): *se derideri*; 5.5 (Perry 527), *derisuri, non spectaturi, sedent*; 5.7 (Perry 529), *facile ad derisum*.

this fable played a key role in Shakespeare's brilliant recreation of this story-telling scene in the opening lines of his own *Coriolanus*.<sup>64</sup> Before turning to Shakespeare's truly dramatic version of the belly and the members, however, it is worth considering what happens to this fable in the medieval Latin tradition.

Although the fable of the belly and the members is not found in the poems of Phaedrus which we possess, the story nevertheless became part of the "Romulus" tradition in the Middle Ages, presumably based on a prose paraphrase of a poem by Phaedrus which was subsequently lost and is not part of the extant corpus of Phaedrus's fables in verse.<sup>65</sup> The medieval Latin tradition of this fable tends to follow the version of the story found in Livy, in which there is an actual revolt by the members of the body, with fatal results. Unlike Livy's account, however, the medieval versions of the fable are not concerned with the historical performance of the fable by Menenius Agrippa. Instead, the fable is now applied to a variety of moral situations, as described in the promythia and epimythia that are regularly attached to the story. The following is a typical prose version in the Romulus tradition:<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Annabel Patterson's *Fables of Power* devotes a chapter to the use of the "belly and the members" fable in the political discourse of early modern England. Although she does not have a clear theory about the Aesopic fable in general, she assembles many interesting citations of and allusions to this fable in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (4.2.2), Sidney's *Defence of Poesie*, William Camden's *Remaines*, Forset's *Comparative Discourse of the Bodies Natural and Politique*, the version in Ogilby's *Fables* and John Milton's extraordinary version in *Of Reformation*. Patterson also provides a detailed discussion of the fable in the larger scheme of Shakespeare's play (which he began writing in 1609) and its relationship to the Midlands food riots of 1607.

<sup>65</sup> For a discussion of this problem, see Chapter 3.

<sup>70</sup> Phaedrianæ fabulae 4.11 (Hervieux II.184) = Perry 130.

Nemo aliquid valet sine suis, ut de partibus corporis humani, de quibus dicitur olim indignatas manus et noluerunt ventri dare cibum suo labore sedente, et pedes laborare non noverunt. Venter esuriens clamabat; at illi nihil paucos dies noluerunt. Postea vero volentes cibum ventri dare recusat. Sic quidem venter quia iam clauserat venas, membra et corpora simul intereunt.

No one can thrive on his own, as is the case with the parts of the human body. There is a story about how once the hands got angry and didn't want to give food to the stomach as it just sat there doing nothing, and the feet didn't do any more work. The stomach grew hungry and shouted [*venter esuriens clamabat*], but they didn't give anything to the stomach for a few days. Then they indeed wanted to give food to the stomach but it refused. So thus when the stomach had closed off the flow to the veins, the members together with the body were dying.

As in both Livy and Plutarch, the endomythium is missing from this written record of the story; the stomach "shouts" (*clamabat*) when it grows hungry, but the moral of the story is not put in the mouth of one of the characters of the story.<sup>71</sup> Instead, the dramatic culmination of the plot provides a demonstration of the lesson of the story, which is explicitly expressed in a promythium at the beginning of the fable and an epimythium at its close. This Latin version of the story does involve an actual plot: the members do in fact carry out their revolt, and as a result all the members and body itself perish. An innovative feature of these medieval Latin versions is the increasingly pathetic quality of the body's demise, as in these medieval Romulus texts:

Venter itaque per multos dies cotidie clamabat dari sibi cibum, priusquam deficeret.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> This same phrase is found in some other Romulus versions cited in Hervieux, such as Romulus Vulgaris 3.16 (Hervieux II.221): *Venter vero esuriens clamabat*; Vincent of Beauvais 22 (Hervieux II.242): *Venter vero esuriens clamabat*; Romuli Vulgaris Breviatae Fabulae 43 (Hervieux II.260): *Venter vero esuriens clamabat*; Romuli Florentini Fabulae, 3.16 (Hervieux II.500): *Venter vero esuriens clamabat*.

<sup>72</sup> Romulus Nilantius 18 (Hervieux II.537).

So for many days the stomach cried out continually [*cotidie clamabat*] that it be given food before it perished.

Esuriens autem venter personuit ut ei cibum donaretur, et nemo ei ministrabat, manibus ac pedibus conspirantibus.<sup>73</sup>

But the stomach grew hungry and shouted [*esuriens autem venter personuit*] that it be given food but no one took care of the stomach, as the hands and the feet were in league together.

The Romulus Anglicus provides even explains that with as the body grew increasingly feeble, it was decided that a doctor had to be summoned, none other than Galen himself - but the good doctor came too late, and there was nothing even he could do:<sup>74</sup>

Sed ille, longa passus ieiunia et iam oblitus ciborum, oblatam escam renuit, quia eam recipere non potuit: taedio enim laborabat; quem morbum physici appetitui contrarium dicunt. Unde etiam Galienus necessarius erat, sed tarde venit.

But the stomach, having endured continual fasting and now forgetful of eating, refused the food it was offered because it was not able to take anything in: it was languishing with weakness, an illness which the doctors call lack of appetite. Finally Galen's services were required, but he arrived too late.

In Caxton, the belly is feminized: facing starvation "she beganne to crye."<sup>75</sup>

And thenne when the bely was empty and sore hongry / she beganne to crye and sayd Allas I deye for hongre / gyve me somewhat to ete / And the feet and handes sayd / thou getest no thyng of us / And by cause that th bely myght have no mete / the conduyts thorough the whiche the metes passeth became smal and narowe / And within fewe dayes after the feete and handes for the feblenes which they felte wold thenne have gyven mete to the bely / but it was to late / for the conduits were ioyned to gyder

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<sup>73</sup> Romuli Vindobonensis Fabulae 53 (Hervieux II.442).

<sup>74</sup> Romuli Anglici Cunctis exortae fabulae 34 (Hervieux II.589).

<sup>75</sup> Caxton 3.16 = Perry 130 (see Lenaghan, 1967). There is an equally pathetic stomach in an early Italian version of the story, from the *Esopo toscano* 55: *e quegli con umiltà cominciava le sue preghiere*. For a discussion of the *Esopo toscano*, see Chapter 5.

A stomach that "beganne to crye" is not likely to pronounce a vicious endomythium; even though we are dealing with the "same" story, the tone of this fable is completely different from the blustering self-confidence of the stomach in the Greek prose version of the story or the scoffing belly in Plutarch. In the malicious and witty spirit of the Aesopic tradition, the Greek prose version (and Plutarch, by implication) showed that the stomach was able to put a stop to the stupid behavior of the rebellious members simply by means of a verbal rebuke: it is the moral (i.e., the endomythium) that carries the fable's didactic force. In the Latin tradition, however, the focus is on the story's disastrous progression, and the stomach's complete loss of control over the situation: the plot itself, rather than the endomythium, conveys the moral of the story.

Thus, the "same" story can emerge in quite different forms, based on the shifting relationship between the development of the plot, on the one hand, and the presence or absence of the endomythium. In addition, we have already seen that the "same" fable can be applied to different sorts of social situations: both Livy and Plutarch link the story to the revolt of the plebs of Rome in 494 B.C.E., a specific historical event, while the epimythium of the Greek prose version of the fable applies the fable to the organization of an army. Then, in the medieval versions of the fable, a different line of interpretation begins to emerge which is based not so much on the hierarchical superiority of the stomach and its privileges, but rather on the integrity of the body, and the need for all the members of the body to cooperate together, as we can see in the promythium to the Romulus tradition:<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Fabulae Phaedrianae 4.11 (Hervieux, II.184).



Nemo aliquid valet sine suis, ut de partibus corporis humani.

No one can thrive on his own, as is the case with the parts of the human body. The same "amicable" interpretation is found in the epimythium to Walter of England's version of the story, in which the moral of the story:<sup>77</sup> *Nemo sibi satis est: eget omnis amicus amico*, "no one is enough until himself; every friend needs a friend." Caxton also repeats this cooperative moral, which has now acquired an explicitly Christian tone:<sup>78</sup> "How shalle one do ony good to another / the which can doo no good to his owne self / As thow mayst see by this fable." I would suggest that this medieval way of reading the fable in terms of the corporate unity of the body has been influenced by the intricate and extended metaphor about the unity of the body in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians:<sup>79</sup>

Sicut enim corpus unum est et membra habet multa, omnia autem membra corporis cum sint multa unum corpus sunt. Ita et Christus, etenim in uno Spiritu omnes nos in unum corpus baptizati sumus, sive Iudaei sive gentiles, sive servi sive liberi, et omnes unum Spiritum potati sumus. Nam et corpus non est unum membrum sed multa. Si dixerit pes, quoniam non sum manus, non sum de corpore, non ideo non est de corpore; et si dixerit auris, quia non sum oculus, non sum de corpore, non ideo non est de corpore; si totum corpus oculus, ubi auditus; si totum auditus, ubi odoratus. Nunc autem posuit Deus membra unumquodque eorum in corpore sicut voluit quod si essent omnia unum membrum ubi corpus, nunc autem multa quidem membra unum autem corpus, non potest dicere oculi manui, opera tua non indigeo, aut iterum caput pedibus, non estis mihi necessarii.

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<sup>77</sup> Walter of England 55 = Perry 130. For a discussion of Walter of England's fables, see Chapter 5.

<sup>78</sup> Caxton 3.16 = Perry 130.

<sup>79</sup> I Corinthians 12.12-21. In his discussion of the history of this fable, Jacobs rightly gives a strong emphasis to this Biblical intertext (1889) but this Biblical passage is oddly disregarded in Patterson's political reading of the belly and the members in early modern English politics (1991).

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if there were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

This non-hierarchical reading of the body and the members by Paul seems to have prompted a specifically Christian response to the Aesopic fable: the story of the members' revolt teaches us not to obey the belly, but instead to "do unto others as we would have them do unto us" (or, in Caxton's words: "How shalle one do ony good to another / the which can doo no good to his owne self").

Yet this is not to say that later applications of the fable were limited to pious Christian echoes of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. Rabelais's *Gargantua* contains yet another interpretation, when Panurge invokes the Aesopic fable in order to sing the praises of universal debt. As far as Panurge is concerned, we are all obligated to borrow money from one another in the same way that the human body would be doomed if it all its parts were not indebted to the others:<sup>80</sup>

And if, with this never-lending world as your model, you turn your attention to that other little world, namely, man himself, you'll uncover a ghastly mess. The head won't lend its eyesight to the feet and the hands, so they can know what they're doing. The feet won't condescend to carry the body. The hands will refuse to work for the head. The heart will be furious, having to work so hard

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<sup>80</sup> Rabelais, *Gargantua* 3.3 (translation by Raffel).

to keep up the pulse, and won't pump any more. The lungs will keep all their breathing to themselves. The liver won't send out blood for the rest of the body. The bladder will refuse to be in debt to the kidneys, and so urine will be abolished. The brain, reflecting on this whole unnatural sequence, will go quietly mad and stop supplying emotion to the nerves or motion to the muscles. In short, in such a lunatic world, nothing owed, nothing lent, nothing borrowed, you'll see a conspiracy far more vicious than anything Aesop dreamed of, when he wrote his dialogue between the stomach and the rest of the body.

Over time, the same Aesopic fable was thus applied to a wide range of social situations: the revolt of the plebs described by Livy and Plutarch, the role of the army generals found in the Greek prose version, the pious Christian cooperation of the medieval Latin fables, and finally Rabelais' secular economy of endless debt and credit. Yet there is still one more version of this story that deserves our attention: the dialogue between Menenius Agrippa and the Roman citizens in the opening scene of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*. Here, for the first time, we can really begin to imagine what the performance of Aesopic fables might have been like in antiquity. Although Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* cannot make great claims to historical truth, I would argue that it is absolutely true to the nature of the Aesopic fable, in all its boisterous orality.

### ***Shakespeare's Coriolanus***

The opening scene of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* draws heavily on North's Plutarch: Menenius Agrippa is sent to the plebs by the Senate and tells them a version of the story of the belly and the members in which the stomach pronounces an endomythium which is meant to put a stop to the body's revolt (that is, Shakespeare's version follows North's Plutarch rather than Livy). Shakespeare, however, has altered his historical source in order to create a stronger link between the contents of the fable

and its political application: whereas in both Livy and Plutarch, Menenius Agrippa tells the fable in response to the financial exploitation of the plebs by the creditors, Shakespeare transfers the story to a later event in the life of Coriolanus, when Rome was afflicted by a famine during the war with the Volscians. This creates a kind of "literal" connection between the fable and its application: just as Aesop told the fable of the *wedding* of the Sun on the occasion of the *wedding* of the thief, Shakespeare's Menenius tells a fable of the body's hunger-strike at a time when the citizens of Rome were, in fact, starving to death.

The first lines of the play thus show the citizens forming a plot to kill Coriolanus and seize direct control of the food supply:<sup>81</sup>

FIRST CITIZEN. Before we proceed any further, hear me speak.

ALL. Speak, speak.

FIRST CITIZEN. You are all resolv'd rather to die than to famish?

ALL. Resolv'd, resolv'd.

FIRST CITIZEN. First, you know Caius Marcius is chief enemy to the people.

ALL. We know't, we know't.

FIRST CITIZEN. Let us kill him, and we'll have corn at our own price. Is't a verdict?

ALL. No more talking on't; let it be done. Away, away!

Shakespeare then dramatizes Menenius Agrippa's arrival on the scene, elaborating on the fact that the Senate chose him for this mission because he was "dear" to the plebs (as noted by both Livy and Plutarch):<sup>82</sup>

SECOND CITIZEN. Worthy Menenius Agrippa; one that hath always lov'd the people.

FIRST CITIZEN. He's one honest enough; would all the rest were so!

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<sup>81</sup> Shakespeare, *Coriolanus* I.1.1 ff.

<sup>82</sup> Shakespeare, *Coriolanus* I.1.50 f.

Received favorably by the citizens, Menenius then attempts to persuade them that they are wrong to attack the Senate. The famine is not the result of the Senate's action; rather, the Senate (according to Menenius Agrippa) is like a father to the plebs, even though the citizens think the Senate is their enemy:<sup>83</sup>

MENENIUS. I tell you, friends, most charitable care  
Have the patricians of you. For your wants,  
Your suffering in this dearth, you may as well  
Strike at the heaven with your staves as lift them  
Against the Roman state; whose course will on  
The way it takes, cracking ten thousand curbs  
Of more strong link asunder than can ever  
Appear in your impediment. For the dearth,  
The gods, not the patricians, make it, and  
Your knees to them, not arms, must help. Alack,  
You are transported by calamity  
Thither where more attends you; and you slander  
The helms o' th' state, who care for you like fathers,  
When you curse them as enemies.

The citizens, not surprisingly, are unimpressed by this line of argument, and immediately reject Menenius Agrippa's claims:<sup>84</sup>

FIRST CITIZEN. Care for us! True, indeed! They ne'er car'd for us yet. Suffer us to famish, and their storehouses cramm'd with grain; make edicts for usury, to support usurers; repeal daily any wholesome act established against the rich, and provide more piercing statutes daily to chain up and restrain the poor. If the wars eat us not up, they will; and there's all the love they bear us.

Having failed in his first line of argumentation, Menenius then proposes to tell a story. Significantly, he resolves to tell the fable because he thinks the citizens are incapable of understanding any other form of argument (a condescending attitude towards his

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<sup>83</sup> Shakespeare, *Coriolanus* I.1.63 ff.

<sup>84</sup> Shakespeare, *Coriolanus* I.1.77 ff.

audience, which Menenius shares with Demades,<sup>85</sup> as we saw earlier):<sup>86</sup>

MENENIUS. Either you must  
Confess yourselves wondrous malicious.  
Or be accus'd of folly. I shall tell you  
A pretty tale. It may be you have heard it;  
But, since it serves my purpose, I will venture  
To stale't a little more.

The citizens, however, are not entirely enthusiastic; in fact, they are wary of Menenius's intentions in changing his line of argumentation. The first citizen voices an explicit protest when he suspects that Menenius Agrippa is simply using the device of the fable to avoid the real issue at hand:<sup>87</sup>

FIRST CITIZEN. Well, I'll hear it, sir; yet you must not think to fob off our disgrace with a tale. But, an't please you, deliver.

Reluctantly, the citizens permit Menenius to tell his story, but they do not let him finish. Instead, they interrupt him at that crucial moment when the stomach is about to pronounce the endomythium of the fable:<sup>88</sup>

MENENIUS. There was a time when all the body's members  
Rebell'd against the belly; thus accus'd it:  
That only like a gulf it did remain  
I' th' midst o' th' body, idle and unactive,  
Still cupboarding the viand, never bearing  
Like labour with the rest; where th' other instruments  
Did see and hear, devise, instruct, walk, feel,  
And, mutually participate, did minister  
Unto the appetite and affection common  
Of the whole body. The belly answer'd-

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<sup>85</sup> For Demades, see Perry 63, cited on p. 1.

<sup>86</sup> Shakespeare, *Coriolanus* I.1.85 ff.

<sup>87</sup> Shakespeare, *Coriolanus* I.1.90 ff.

<sup>88</sup> Shakespeare, *Coriolanus* I.1.94 ff.

FIRST CITIZEN. Well, sir, what answer made the belly?

The citizens realize that the "answer" of the belly, the endomythium of the fable, is an important point of dispute: it is precisely in the endomythium that Menenius will explain the story's meaning, and this meaning is naturally of profound interest to the rebellious citizen-members. Confronted with this hostility on the part of the citizens, Menenius deftly asserts his authority as the teller of the story, as the maker of fictions. Launching into the endomythium, Menenius glorifies the voice of the storyteller, the master of the tale who can "make the belly smile as well as speak":<sup>89</sup>

MENENIUS. Sir, I shall tell you. With a kind of smile,  
Which ne'er came from the lungs, but even thus-  
For look you, I may make the belly smile  
As well as speak- it tauntingly replied  
To th' discontented members, the mutinous parts  
That envied his receipt; even so most fitly  
As you malign our senators for that  
They are not such as you.

Menenius is now ready to hurl the insulting endomythium, "tauntingly" at the citizens, while the confrontation becomes increasingly hostile. The bold citizen in fact prevents Menenius from pronouncing the "belly's answer," and instead he proposes a new interpretation of the symbolic belly: it is a cormorant feeding out of control, the veritable sink of the body. Even though the citizen is not the storyteller, he too avails himself of the figurative language of the fable to launch an indirect attack on the character of the Senate:<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Shakespeare, *Coriolanus* I.1.105 ff.

<sup>90</sup> Shakespeare, *Coriolanus* I.1.112 ff.

FIRST CITIZEN. Your belly's answer- What? [...]  
 MENENIUS. What then?  
 Fore me, this fellow speaks! What then? What then?  
 FIRST CITIZEN. Should by the cormorant belly be restrain'd.  
Who is the sink o' th' body-  
 MENENIUS. Well, what then?  
 FIRST CITIZEN. The former agents, if they did complain,  
 What could the belly answer?  
 MENENIUS. I will tell you;  
 If you'll bestow a small- of what you have little-  
 Patience awhile, you'st hear the belly's answer.  
 FIRST CITIZEN. Y'are long about it.

At last the citizen cedes the floor again to Menenius, but with the insulting "y'are long about it," as if the citizen himself had not been the cause of the delay. The citizen thus manages to exert a force on the emerging dialogue while at the same time seeming to erase his (defiant) presence from the actual progress of the dispute (a deceptively passive aggression, as likewise when Aesop resisted his master's interrogation on the auction block). Following this interruption, Menenius seeks to regain the dignity of his position, as he pronounces the deliberate opinion of the "most grave belly":<sup>91</sup>

MENENIUS. Note me this, good friend:  
Your most grave belly was deliberate,  
Not rash like his accusers, and thus answered.  
 'True is it, my incorporate friends,' quoth he  
 'That I receive the general food at first  
 Which you do live upon; and fit it is,  
 Because I am the storehouse and the shop  
 Of the whole body. But, if you do remember,  
 I send it through the rivers of your blood,  
 Even to the court, the heart, to th' seat o' th' brain;  
 And, through the cranks and offices of man,  
 The strongest nerves and small inferior veins  
 From me receive that natural competency  
 Whereby they live. And though that all at once

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<sup>91</sup> Shakespeare, *Coriolanus* I.1.125 ff.



You, my good friends'- this says the belly; mark me.  
 FIRST CITIZEN. Ay, sir; well, well.  
 MENENIUS. 'Though all at once cannot  
 See what I do deliver out to each,  
 Yet I can make my audit up, that all  
 From me do back receive the flour of all,  
 And leave me but the bran.' What say you to' t?  
 FIRST CITIZEN. It was an answer. How apply you this?

The citizen's response to the fable is very telling. Although he has no doubt understood the point of the story for himself, he refuses to comment and instead demands that Menenius Agrippa reveal his full intentions in telling such a tale: "How apply you this?" he demands. In this case it is the audience that forces the epimythium: not because they do not understand the story, but because they are still not persuaded by it. Thus, even in a face-to-face oral confrontation, the epimythium can be used not merely to neutralize or translate the meaning of the endomythium (as we saw in the written tradition); rather, the epimythium is being used here to carry on the argument, forcing Menenius to declare himself openly. Menenius matches the citizen's defiance, and his explanation of the fable's meaning suddenly turns into a personal attack on the same citizen who had demanded that explanation:<sup>92</sup>

MENENIUS. The senators of Rome are this good belly,  
 And you the mutinous members; for, examine  
 Their counsels and their cares, digest things rightly  
 Touching the weal o' th' common, you shall find  
 No public benefit which you receive  
 But it proceeds or comes from them to you,  
 And no way from yourselves. What do you think,  
You, the great toe of this assembly?  
 FIRST CITIZEN. I the great toe? Why the great toe?  
 MENENIUS. For that, being one o' th' lowest, basest, poorest,

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<sup>92</sup> Shakespeare, *Coriolanus* I.1.146 ff.

Of this most wise rebellion, thou goest foremost.  
Thou rascal, that art worst in blood to run,  
Lead'st first to win some vantage.  
But make you ready your stiff bats and clubs.  
Rome and her rats are at the point of battle;  
The one side must have bale.

At this point, Coriolanus enters, just as Menenius is launching a vicious attack on the protesting citizen, calling him the "big toe" of the citizen body, "the lowest, basest, poorest" member of the rebellion -- a rebellion that Menenius sarcastically describes as "most wise." Clearly, his fable has not cured the citizens of their folly, and the hostility of the encounter is at its peak: as far as Menenius is concerned, the citizens are simply "rats." The rats can fight, if they wish, but they run the risk of disaster in so doing: one side, or the other, "must have bale." In the midst of this now open rancor, Coriolanus joins in the free-wheeling exchange of invective as he makes his own address to the citizens:<sup>93</sup>

MARTIUS. Thanks. - What's the matter, you dissentious rogues,  
That rubbing the poor itch of your opinion,  
Make yourselves scabs?

The scene that Shakespeare offers to us is in every way different from the unbelievable calm reported in both Livy and Plutarch. The Aesopic fable has failed as a means of diplomacy here, and has instead turned into an instrument of abuse: Menenius has simply insulted the citizens, calling their leader the "great toe" of the citizen body, while that same citizen has called the Senate "a cormorant belly," the "very sink of the body," and Coriolanus himself joins in the exchange of colorful insults, calling the citizens "scabs."

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<sup>93</sup> Shakespeare, *Coriolanus* I.1.161 ff.

This exchange of invective is surely much closer to the original form and function of the Aesopic fable than the tame and subdued versions transmitted in Livy or Plutarch. Shakespeare's recreation of the story-telling scene is characteristically brilliant, and owes much to the dramatist's extraordinary style, but at the same time I would argue that it is not only Shakespeare's dramatic genius that makes this performance possible, but rather the inherent orality of the Aesopic fable as a genre. Our textual sources present these ancient fables in a detached and even stifled form, yet we must remember that the morals of these stories were never authoritative pronouncements, but rather vicious and witty engagements, confrontations between a speaker and an audience in which the outcome was never a foregone conclusion. This dialogic quality is completely absent from the collections of Aesopic fables that have reached us from antiquity, but it is clearly present in the very structure of the Aesopic fable as a genre, in which the witty and insulting endomythium originally carried the full force of the moral. The endomythium pretends to be contained within the story but in fact it is laughing out loud, breaking the boundaries of its fiction, mocking and amusing its audience. When Livy and Plutarch take the endomythium out of this fable, for example, leaving only the epimythium, they remove the drama of the story and dull the sharpness of its point. Yet in a single precious word, the derisive *katagelan* of Plutarch's version of the story, we are reminded that the Aesopic fable was always rife with abuse and laughter. Shakespeare's dialogue can help us to hear the sound of that laughter, when the ancient texts that we possess have instead grown reticent with time.

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## CHAPTER 3

### Author and Authority in Phaedrus's Fables

#### Part One. The Ambitions of the Author

In the early decades of this era, a Roman freedman named Phaedrus<sup>1</sup> began writing collections of Aesopic fables in Latin verse.<sup>2</sup> Phaedrus's books are, in fact, the earliest extant collections of fables that we have inherited from antiquity.<sup>3</sup> The first four books of Phaedrus's fables appear to be relatively intact, and we also have part of a fifth book (all of these deriving from a ninth-century manuscript), for a total of approximately 90 fables. In addition to the fables of Books I-V, a further 30 fables are contained in the so-called "Perotti Appendix" transcribed by the humanist scholar Niccolo Perotti in the fifteenth century from a manuscript that was subsequently lost.<sup>4</sup> It is not known what materials Phaedrus used to write his fables; the most likely source would have been a Greek prose collection (or collections), no longer extant, which would have suggested to

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<sup>1</sup> Or perhaps Phaeder. For the problem of Phaedrus's name, Phaedrus or Phaeder, Havet's discussion is the most complete (1895); he argues on the basis of epigraphic evidence for the name "Phaeder."

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the metrical qualities of Phaedrus's Latin verse, see LaPenna (1959).

<sup>3</sup> On the dating of the Greek prose collections, see Perry (1965). The Greek prose collections may date back to as early as the first century, but betray many signs of later editing, and are more likely third and fourth century productions.

<sup>4</sup> Phaedrus's poetry did not circulate as such in the Middle Ages, and effectively disappeared until the publication of the *Codex Pithoeanus* in 1596. For the history of the Phaedrus manuscripts and the appendix of poems discovered by Perotti, see Boldrini's studies (especially 1986).

Phaedrus the contents of his stories, and might also have suggested to him the formal device of adding promythia and epimythia to the tales.<sup>5</sup> Phaedrus's poems are strongly marked by this editorial practice of glossing the fables with an additional moral at either the beginning or the end of the fable.<sup>6</sup> Both the verse form of Phaedrus's fables and his heavy-handed use of the promythia and epimythia make it clear that Phaedrus's fables are an intellectual product, the work of an editor at a considerable distance from the oral tradition of fable-telling.

Of course, by writing his fables in verse, Phaedrus has gone farther than the Greek prose collections in his literary adaptation of the folkloric fable tradition: Phaedrus is not merely an editor compiling fables, but a poet, and a very ambitious poet at that.<sup>7</sup> In the opening lines of the prologue to his first book, Phaedrus acknowledges his debt to Aesop, that is, to the folkloric and oral tradition of the fables, but he also makes strong claims for his own original, literary contribution to that tradition.<sup>8</sup> Phaedrus takes the

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<sup>5</sup> Perry's article on the lost fable collection of Demetrius of Phalerum (1962) discusses Phaedrus's relationship to the extant Greek fable tradition.

<sup>6</sup> Although Phaedrus clearly preferred promythia to epimythia in his earlier books (see Perry 1940: 413-417), I am not making any specific argument with regard to the function of the promythia as opposed to the function of the epimythia: they basically serve the same function for Phaedrus, allowing him to assert his interpretive authority over the fables.

<sup>7</sup> There is, of course, the tantalizing story of Socrates deciding to put Aesopic fables to verse, as told in the *Phaedo* (for a discussion, see van Dijk, 1997: 340-342).

<sup>8</sup> Perry, on the other hand, insists that Phaedrus does not mean a person at all when he says Aesop (1962: 325-326): "the 'Aesop' which was the common source of Phaedrus and Babrius is very likely to have been the well-known collection made by Demetrius, namely the *Aisopeia* [...] It was probably the book which Phaedrus calls 'Aesop' that he professes to follow at the beginning."

"stuff" of his fables from Aesop, and then turns that raw material into polished pieces of poetry:<sup>9</sup>

Aesopus auctor quam materiam repperit,  
Hanc ego polivi versibus senariis.

The material [*materiam*] which Aesop, the founder [*auctor*], discovered, I have polished [*hanc ego polivi*] in lines of poetry.

Phaedrus's decision to produce books of fables in verse was apparently an innovative choice; although there were collections of Aesopic fables in Greek prose dating back at least to the Hellenistic period,<sup>10</sup> as well as individual poems on Aesopic topics by both Greek and Latin authors (such as Archilochus in Greek, and Ennius in Latin),<sup>11</sup> Phaedrus was apparently the first writer to compose whole books of Aesopic fables in verse.

Shortly after Phaedrus composed these books of Aesopic fables in verse, Babrius undertook a similar project in Greek. This Babrius is a poet whose biography is even more elusive than that of Phaedrus. Although we cannot be entirely sure that Phaedrus

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<sup>9</sup> Phaedrus explicitly declares in the epilogue to Book III that he is leaving material for other craftsman to work into poetry, and repeats this claim again in the prologue to Book IV: *ut aliis esset materiae satis*, "so that there might be enough material left for others." Phaedrus again uses the word *materia* in 4.26.7 to describe the subject matter which Simonides used in composing his poems.

<sup>10</sup> See especially Perry's work on Demetrius of Phalerum (1962).

<sup>11</sup> Aesopic fables are found in many ancient literary sources; van Dijk's monumental study of the ancient Greek literary versions of Aesopic fables is indispensable in studying this phenomenon (1997). The earliest literary fable in the Latin tradition is Ennius's fable of the lark reported in Aulus Gellius (= Perry 325); for a discussion of the narrative structure of this fable see Menna (1983). For an analysis of its semiotic structure in relation to Phaedrus's rhetoric of interpretation, see Bettini (1996).

was in fact a freedman of Augustus,<sup>12</sup> the references in his poems to his troubles with Sejanus do allow us to date Phaedrus confidently in the first century of this era. As for Babrius, it seems likely that he was writing in the second half of the first century, probably somewhere in Syria (although possibly in the early second century, and dates as late as the third and fourth century have also been argued by some scholars.)<sup>13</sup> Yet there is an essential difference between the poems of Babrius and Phaedrus which throws further light on Phaedrus's bold innovation in the literary history of the Aesopic fable. While Babrius takes up a self-effacing attitude towards his own persona in the poems (erasing his presence in much the same way that the editors of the Greek prose collections erase their own presence from their anonymous books), Phaedrus is a constant figure in his own poetry, a literary author, a persona, a personality, whose presence in the poems is overwhelming. Thus, as I will show in this chapter, Phaedrus took a traditional, anonymous folk genre and impressed the stamp of his personality on both the form and contents of the fables that he told -- and was the first, and only, author to do so in antiquity.<sup>14</sup> Although Phaedrus rightly credits Aesop with being the *auctor* of the fable

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<sup>12</sup> This biographical information is provided in the ninth century manuscript of the fables, but without any ancient corroboration. Phaedrus's biography has exerted a kind of fatal attraction for scholars over the ages. Thus, despite the fact that we possess no evidence beyond the poems themselves (which are very rarely biographical in any detailed sense), there is rampant speculation about the most intimate details of Phaedrus's life. Indeed, there is even a book-length biography of the poet Phaedrus, written by Attilio de Lorenzi (1955).

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of Babrius and the complicated (even mysterious) manuscript tradition of his fables, see the discussion in Perry (1965).

<sup>14</sup> The folkloristic figure of Aesop was connected with many kinds of stories other than fables. Perry's characterization of Aesop (1962: 302) is very useful in this regard: "This [aetiological story of the lark attributed to Aesop in Aristophanes's *Birds*] is not an



genre, in the sense of "founding" or "creating" the form,<sup>15</sup> Phaedrus is the first author of a book of Aesopic fables, in our modern sense of the word: the author as writer, highly aware of his relationship to an audience of readers. This is not to say that Phaedrus enjoyed much popular success for his work with the fables: Phaedrus's efforts to make himself into a writer of fables and to make the folkloristic fables into a literary genre, seem to have been a complete failure. Phaedrus did not become a famous Roman poet,<sup>16</sup> and even though he refers to the Aesopic *materia* that he so generously left for other poets to use, he found no followers.<sup>17</sup> Phaedrus did not achieve real popularity until the Latin Middle Ages, when his poems circulated all over Europe, inspiring countless imitations and adaptations: but by the time that this happened, Phaedrus's poems were no longer poems, and the name Phaedrus had been completely forgotten. Already in late antiquity, Phaedrus's poems (a more complete collection than we now

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Aesopic fable in the generic sense of the term as it was commonly understood in later antiquity and now, because it is not metaphorical; but Aesop's reputation was that of a wit who was very clever at repartee and one who would use *any* kind of story or jest which would serve to turn the tables on an adversary, or to win an argument."

<sup>15</sup> See Benveniste (1973: II.2.6, on *censor* and *auctoritas*) for a discussion of the etymology of *auctor* in terms of origination, the creation of something that was not there before. This use of *auctor* is also found in Phaedrus 3.13, in a dispute between bees and wasps over who made the honey: by inspecting the honeycombs carefully, it will be apparent who the "author" of the honey is; *auctor horum appareat*.

<sup>16</sup> For Phaedrus's literary biography, see LaPenna's very useful discussion (1959).

<sup>17</sup> In 3.20 Phaedrus explains the possibilities remaining for future poems: *siquis eadem forte conari velit, / habere ut possit aliquid operis residui: / quamvis materiae tanta abundet copia, / labori faber ut desit, non fabro labor*. "So that there might be left some remaining material if anybody by chance would want to attempt it; in any case, there is such an abundant supply of material, that there might be a lack of workers for the work, but not a lack of work for the workers."

possess) were put into prose, and began to circulate under the practically anonymous name of "Romulus."<sup>18</sup> Thus, while Phaedrus prided himself on having taken an anonymous, folkloristic genre and turned it into literary poetry, the force of that anonymous genre quickly swallowed up Phaedrus's own efforts as an author and ironically returned the fables to the anonymous *materia* from which he had extracted them. Phaedrus's poetic efforts, and his very name, were forgotten until his re-discovery in the late sixteenth century.

Thus, we must imagine Phaedrus being squeezed between the forces of his own literary ambitions as a poet and the cultural force of the anonymous Aesopic tradition. Modern scholars have been quick to come to Phaedrus's aid on the poetic front, defending his style and asserting the significance of his contribution within a Roman literary context, often by conjuring up the drama of Phaedrus's biography as a freedman poet.<sup>19</sup> In this chapter, however, I would like to turn to the other side of the problem: that is, to the peculiar relationship between Phaedrus's fables and the folkloristic tradition of which they form a vital but problematic part. What made it possible for Phaedrus to assert himself as a writer within the un-writerly folk tradition of the fables? Adapting the fables from prose into verse was one way to assert himself as a writer, as Phaedrus

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<sup>18</sup> The texts of the various "Romuli" are assembled in Hervieux, vol. II. For some very provocative and interesting comments on how we can understand "Romulus" as a tradition, see Boldrini's brief but useful introduction to his edition of Walter of England's Latin fables with their Italian adaptations (1994).

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Bloomer's important essay on Phaedrus, in which he analyzes Phaedrus's poetic vocabulary in a highly Roman context, without any particular interest in the folkloristic Aesopic tradition (1997).

himself boasted in the opening lines of Book I: *hanc (materiam) ego polivi*. Yet I would argue that the way in which Phaedrus inserted himself as an author into this anonymous folkloristic form depended even more on the structure of the form that he inherited, specifically, on the editorial practice of adding promythia and epimythia to the fables. The editors of the Greek prose collections of fables had already begun to supplement the "endomythium," the moral expressed inside the story, with additions of their own devising: these promythia and epimythia did not turn those fables into literary works of art, but they did create a space that Phaedrus was able to aggressively exploit in his own literary appropriation of the genre.

### ***Promythia and Epimythia in Phaedrus***

As I argued in the previous chapter, the editorial use of promythia and epimythia is largely the result of the fables' decontextualization. In the oral tradition, Aesopic fables were weapons in social disputes, used by "real-life" protagonists as a fictional mirror for actual events. You could tell an Aesopic fable to comment on an on-going situation, pointing out a mistake that someone had made (or was about to make); the fable was meant to provide an illuminating illustration of the problem, an admonition that could guide your own or someone else's behavior. Unfortunately, we possess very little information about the actual use of fables in antiquity, aside from a few scattered fictional descriptions of fables in performance.<sup>20</sup> The story of Menenius Agrippa in Livy and

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<sup>20</sup> This is in sharp contrast to the Sanskrit literary tradition of the *Panchatantra* and similar collections, in which stories that are functionally and formally equivalent to Aesopic fables in every way are inserted into elaborate frame tales which provide a

Plutarch points to the use of the fables in a political context,<sup>21</sup> and the *Life of Aesop* shows Aesop himself making use of fables as he attempts to persuade the Delphians to spare his life. Phaedrus is actually an important source for these fictional accounts of the fables as they might have been used in context. For example, we have already seen that Phaedrus inserts the fable of the "frogs at the wedding of the sun" into an anecdote about Aesop at the wedding of a thief: Aesop tells the fable of the frogs to castigate his neighbors for their rejoicing at the thief's establishing a family.<sup>22</sup> Later in this chapter, I will discuss Phaedrus's version of the "frogs asking for a king," which is presented as a fable that Aesop tells the Athenians to warn them about the dangerous consequences of their foolish political behavior.<sup>23</sup> Yet even though Phaedrus does provide a few such fables in context (or in a simulated context) the large majority of Phaedrus's fables do not come with this performance setting.

Thus, much like the editors of the Greek prose versions of the fables, Phaedrus is dealing with these fables taken "out of context." When these fables are deprived of their performance context, promythia and epimythia can be used to explain the "point" of the fable -- a point which would have been abundantly clear in the fable's contextual performance. Yet while the ancient editors reinforce the point of the fable by using

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fictional performance context for the stories. There is nothing like this *frametales* tradition in ancient Greek or Roman literature, although there are some affinities between the *Panchatantra* genre and the medieval beast epic organized around Reynard the fox and the court of the lion king.

<sup>21</sup> Perry 130, cited on 101.

<sup>22</sup> Perry 314, cited on p. 91.

<sup>23</sup> Perry 44.

promythia and epimythia, it is important to note that they did not group the fables according to some formal arrangement within the contextual structure of the book itself. That is, the editors did not recognize that the serial format actually could have provided them with a way to organize the fables according to topics and themes. The Greek prose collections of fables are arranged alphabetically according to the first word of the fable (which is often, but not always, the name of one of the characters) and the verse fables of Babrius were also transmitted in this alphabetical format.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Phaedrus appears oblivious to the possibilities offered by the book format for arranging the fables in groups. On the one hand, Phaedrus is clearly aware of the book as a format for presentation, and he equips each of his books with prologues and sometimes epilogues. Yet the fables do not appear to be arranged in any notable thematic groups; instead, each fable stands discretely separate from the preceding and succeeding poems. In fact, it will not be until the medieval fables of Odo of Cheriton (in Chapter 4) that we will see some attempt to organize the fables in a book thematically. Thus, as Phaedrus assembles his fables, he continues to have each fable stand alone, disconnected from a traditional performance context, and disconnected from the preceding and succeeding poems in the book, just as in the Greek prose collections of fables.

Yet Phaedrus goes much farther than the editors of the prose collections in his use of the promythia and epimythia. Phaedrus is not merely an editor annotating the materials he has collected; instead, he is the author of these fables, and he asserts himself

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<sup>24</sup> On alphabetizing in antiquity, and on the important evidence offered by the Aesopic collections, see Daly (1967).

as a continuous presence from poem to poem within the rhetorical space provided by these supplementary morals. As Phaedrus composes his books of Aesopic fables, he speaks as the writer to his readers from the platform of the promythia or the epimythia, asserting his authority not only to tell the stories, but also to interpret them. Correspondingly, the endomythium diminishes in importance to such a degree that many of Phaedrus's fables have no endomythium at all; the witty "last words" spoken by the characters in the fables themselves are no longer essential when the author is already there to explain the meaning of the fable himself. Phaedrus's suppression of the endomythia and his active exploitation of the space provided by the promythia and epimythia is unusual even within the literary tradition of Aesopic fables. Other poets who put the fables into verse (such as Babrius, or later Avianus, Marie de France, or LaFontaine) generally deferred to the folkloristic form of the fable, letting the characters in the story speak for themselves through the endomythium, the moral inside the story. Thus, while LaFontaine, Marie, and the rest were certainly "authors" in a literary sense, they assume more the posture of an anonymous editor, functionally equivalent to those anonymous editors of the Greek prose collections. Phaedrus, on the other hand, continually asserts himself as the author of the fables, a writer who has acquired a persona of moral authority.

### ***Phaedrus and the Aesopic Tradition***

Before describing Phaedrus's innovative stylistic approach to the fables, I need to begin with an assessment of the contents of Phaedrus's books of poems and their peculiar

relationship to the Aesopic tradition that he inherited. Although I will be emphasizing in this chapter the more "deviant" poems of Phaedrus, it must always be remembered that he is writing both inside and outside the Aesopic tradition, both with it and against it. Unfortunately, the fragmentary state of the Aesopic corpus sometimes makes it very hard to see clearly the relationship of Phaedrus's work to the larger Aesopic tradition. Of the 122 fables of Phaedrus that are extant, only about one in four are also found in a Greek version: 27 are found in the Greek prose collections and 17 are found in Babrius, for a total of 29 different fables represented both in the Greek fable tradition and in Phaedrus. Yet there is no reason to think that the remaining 93 fables were Phaedrus's invention (even less that they represent some kind of indigenous "Latin" fable tradition). Instead, it is simply a matter of historical accident that Phaedrus is our first (and sometimes only) source for what were surely traditional Aesopic fables, such as the story of the jackdaw in borrowed feathers, the fox and the crane inviting one another to dinner, the doves who make the kite their guardian, the rooster who finds a pearl in the manure, and so on. There is no direct relationship between the fables of Phaedrus on the one hand (the oldest extant collection), the fables of Babrius on the other hand (probably next in line chronologically, after Phaedrus), and the Greek prose collections of fables (dating roughly to the first through the fourth centuries C.E. but derived from a tradition of Aesopic collections dating back to the early Hellenistic period).<sup>25</sup> For reasons having much to

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<sup>25</sup> The two main inventories of Aesopica -- Perry and Rodriguez-Adrados -- both completely exhaust their listings of Greek fables before reaching Phaedrus. Thus, in Perry's *Aesopica*, there are fables from the Byzantine *Tetrasticha* which are inventoried before Perry even gets around to listing the materials from Phaedrus and Avianus: the Greek fables run up to number 471, and Perry then begins his numeration of Phaedrus

do with scholarly prejudice but little to do with Aesopic fables, almost all fable scholarship has considered the Greek fables, prose or verse, to be more "prototypical" simply because they are in Greek (although in their written form they are clearly later than Phaedrus). In addition to this prejudice in favor of any Greek source (no matter how late), there has also been a real reluctance on the part of scholars to deal with the fact that all the ancient collections of fables, Greek and Latin, prose and poetry, clearly contain extraneous materials that are not Aesopic fables: aetiological stories, insulting anecdotes, apophthegmata of various popular philosophers (Aesop himself, Diogenes, Simonides), and other types of jokes and witty stories.<sup>26</sup> Finally, the peculiar manuscript history of Phaedrus suggests yet another serious dilemma for the reconstruction of the ancient corpus of Aesopic fables: the books of Phaedrus that we possess are incomplete, and the medieval prose paraphrases of Phaedrus contain what are surely stories taken from Phaedrus but which are missing from the body of his work that has reached us in verse form. I would argue that these fables also have their place in our inventory of the

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with 472 onwards. Rodriguez-Adrados follows a similar system in which a complete inventory of Greek fables (the "H" series) precedes the Latin fables (the "no-H" series).

<sup>26</sup> The refusal of modern scholars to come to terms with a definition of the Aesopic fable is made most clear by the following dilemma. Perry and Rodriguez-Adrados insist on treating every item in the ancient Aesopic collections as if they were fables, including, for example, anecdotes about Tiberius and Augustus that are found in Phaedrus. At the same time, they do not include identical types of anecdotes told about the emperors as found in other ancient sources, such as Suetonius. Why is a humorous anecdote about Tiberius as told by Phaedrus an "Aesopic fable," while a similarly humorous anecdote about Tiberius told by Suetonius not an "Aesopic fable"? Clearly, the attempt to inventory Aesopic fables based on including every item from every Aesopic collection is doomed to this inconsistency.



ancient Aesopic corpus, even though they are attested only in medieval prose paraphrases.<sup>27</sup>

Of course, what are problems for us today as scholars of the Aesopic fable were not problems for Phaedrus, at least not problems to the same degree. Precisely because Phaedrus was turning into a literary genre something that did not exactly exist as literature before, he enjoyed an enormous freedom in putting together his books of poems, and he was encouraged in that freedom by the chaotic state of the Aesopic fable genre itself. At the same time, Phaedrus was himself surely aware of this problem of defining the fable, because in his initial books, Phaedrus stays within the boundaries of the Aesopic fable as I have defined it in Chapter 1: the stories that Phaedrus tells in his Books I and II fit the definition of the Aesopic fable that I have proposed here: brief and witty exempla about the punishment or prevention of a mistake. In his later books, however, Phaedrus increasingly includes materials that fall outside this definition.

Most notably, Phaedrus seemed to have had a special attraction to witty anecdotes about famous people, real or legendary. These stories do not belong in any sense to the genre of Aesopic fables, but are instead closer to another genre of ancient wisdom literature, the "apophthegmata," or wise and witty sayings of famous people. Of Phaedrus's 122 extant poems, 19 fall into this category. So, for example, Phaedrus provides an account of Augustus himself as he ingeniously solves the mystery of a

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<sup>27</sup> These prose paraphrases suggest a sort of "working definition" of the Aesopic fable: when being converted from poetry into prose, Phaedrus's fables were also culled for content, and the most extraneous, non-Aesopic fables (anecdotes about Augustus and Tiberius, for example) were omitted from the prose collections.

scandalous Roman murder,<sup>28</sup> and there is also an anecdote about Tiberius and a flatterer at court,<sup>29</sup> as well as a story about Pompey and a burly, effeminate soldier.<sup>30</sup> There are also two anecdotes about Simonides (in one fable Simonides is shipwrecked,<sup>31</sup> and in the other fable Simonides is rescued from disaster by Castor and Pollux<sup>32</sup>), along with a story about Demetrius of Phalerum and Menander,<sup>33</sup> and two anecdotes about Socrates (one fable about Socrates and the dearth of true friends,<sup>34</sup> and another fable about Socrates and the adulterous slave<sup>35</sup>). Finally, there is also a contemporary Roman story about a flute player named "Princeps."<sup>36</sup>

Most numerous are the stories which Phaedrus tells about Aesop himself, of which there are fourteen. In four of those stories, Aesop is depicted as telling an actual Aesopic fable: the foolish frogs rejoicing at the Sun's wedding,<sup>37</sup> the foolish frogs seeking a king,<sup>38</sup> the captain and the foolish passengers on a ship at sea,<sup>39</sup> and the foolish young

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<sup>28</sup> Phaedrus 3.10 = Perry 501.

<sup>29</sup> Phaedrus 2.5 = Perry 489.

<sup>30</sup> Phaedrus Appendix 10 = Perry 538.

<sup>31</sup> Phaedrus 4.23 = Perry 519.

<sup>32</sup> Phaedrus 4.26 = Perry 522.

<sup>33</sup> Phaedrus 5.1 = Perry 523.

<sup>34</sup> Phaedrus 3.9 = Perry 500.

<sup>35</sup> Phaedrus Appendix 27 = Perry 554.

<sup>36</sup> Phaedrus 5.7 = Perry 529.

<sup>37</sup> Phaedrus 1.6 = Perry 314, cited on p. 93.

<sup>38</sup> Phaedrus 1.2 = Perry 44, cited on p. 149.

calf and the bull.<sup>40</sup> In the ten other stories that Phaedrus tells about Aesop, Aesop has nothing to do with the genre of Aesopic fable, but instead emerges as a legendary joker and popular philosopher, much like Simonides or Socrates. Indeed, it would even be possible to substitute Simonides or Socrates for Aesop in any of these stories, in that there is nothing distinctively "Aesopic" about the tales. Instead, these are the kinds of stories that can be told about any kind of legendary joker or popular philosopher whosoever. So, for example, Phaedrus tells a story in which Aesop explains the birth of lambs with human heads by accusing the shepherds of sleeping with the sheep, while Plutarch tells an identical story about Thales.<sup>41</sup> Another story told about Aesop found in Phaedrus -- in which Aesop uses the image of the bow to argue that relaxation is also good for the soul -- went on to enjoy tremendous popularity in the Middle Ages as an example of St. Anthony's wisdom!<sup>42</sup> Aesop's status as a slave is relevant to two of Phaedrus's stories: in one story Aesop is engaged in a bitter dispute with his master's wife,<sup>43</sup> and in another story Aesop actually dissuades an unhappy slave from running

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<sup>39</sup> Phaedrus 4.18 = Perry 78.

<sup>40</sup> Phaedrus Appendix 12 = Perry 540.

<sup>41</sup> Phaedrus 3.3 = Perry 495. Plutarch's story about Thales is found in his *Banquet of the Seven Sages* (a dialogue in which Aesop himself makes an appearance!); see the discussion in Jedrkiewicz's recent monograph on Plutarch's treatment of Aesop in the context of the other sages (1997).

<sup>42</sup> This anecdote is told of St. Antony in the *Legenda Aurea* (see Ryan, 1993), and thus circulated widely in the Middle Ages (see Tubach's *Index Exemplorum* 272, with variations involving St. John the Evangelist).

<sup>43</sup> Phaedrus Appendix 17 = Perry 545.

away.<sup>44</sup> Most of Phaedrus's Aesop anecdotes are based on a vicious rebuke or insult which has much in common with the insulting tone of the Aesopic fable. The difference is that these humorous anecdotes are not exempla: unlike traditional Aesopic fables, these comic stories do not construct an enigmatic picture of our own world disguised in figurative language. In one story, Aesop makes fun of a man who is too talkative;<sup>45</sup> in other story, he teases a man who has been bitten by a dog;<sup>46</sup> he rebukes a boastful athlete<sup>47</sup> and he also makes fun of a boastful writer.<sup>48</sup> Aesop's mean-spiritedness emerges most clearly in a revenge story: when a hooligan throws stones at Aesop, Aesop tricks the stupid boy into throwing stones at a rich man, a crime for which the boy is eventually crucified.<sup>49</sup> Of course, Aesop is not entirely vicious and is capable of more socially integrative acts of wisdom: in the story of the enigmatic bequest of a wealthy man to his wife and daughters, Aesop is the only person in the city who can solve the mystery of the man's will.<sup>50</sup> Notably, Aesop is not presented as a story-teller in most of these poems, the humor of which does not depend on Aesop's story-telling skills. Thus, while it is true that Phaedrus considers Aesop to be the founder of the fable genre

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<sup>44</sup> Phaedrus Appendix 20 = Perry 548.

<sup>45</sup> Phaedrus 3.19 = Perry 510.

<sup>46</sup> Phaedrus 2.3 = Perry 64.

<sup>47</sup> Phaedrus Appendix 13 = Perry 541.

<sup>48</sup> Phaedrus Appendix 9 = Perry 537.

<sup>49</sup> Phaedrus 3.5 = Perry 497.

<sup>50</sup> Phaedrus 4.5 = Perry 512.

(and, moreover, he considers the fable genre to be especially suited to slaves and, to himself, an ex-slave),<sup>51</sup> it is also the case that Phaedrus seems attracted to Aesop's sheer "celebrity," in the same way that he is attracted to the celebrity of Augustus and Pompey, or Simonides and Socrates.

In addition to these witty anecdotes about famous persons, Phaedrus also includes some outright jokes (although not especially funny ones), which he awkwardly attempts to equip with morals in order to fit them into the Aesopic framework. There is, for example, a hapless joke told by a butcher apropos of an ugly ape hanging up in his shop;<sup>52</sup> and a somewhat more successful joke about a eunuch's inability to provide *testes* in court.<sup>53</sup> There are also some jokes whose extreme length immediately distinguishes them from traditional Aesopic fables; examples of these anecdotes include a long story about a man who fools an audience in the theater by making sounds like a pig, a version of the story of the "Widow of Ephesus,"<sup>54</sup> a story about a poor suitor who accidentally wins the bride because the donkey delivers her to his house,<sup>55</sup> a story about a young man who chooses to believe the lies a courtesan tells him,<sup>56</sup> and the elaborate story of the

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<sup>51</sup> For a discussion of Aesopic fables as a subaltern genre, see Chapter 2, p. 94.

<sup>52</sup> Phaedrus 3.4 = Perry 496.

<sup>53</sup> Phaedrus 3.11 = Perry 502.

<sup>54</sup> Phaedrus Appendix 15 = Perry 543.

<sup>55</sup> Phaedrus Appendix 16 = Perry 544.

<sup>56</sup> Phaedrus Appendix 29 = Perry 555.

truth-teller and the liar at the court of the monkey-king.<sup>57</sup> Unlike the anecdotes about famous people which tend to fall out of the later Aesopic tradition, a few of these stories went on to enjoy a certain success in the medieval collections: versions of the "Widow of Ephesus" are found in a number of medieval fable books, as is the story of the truth-teller and the liar at the court of the monkey-king.

Finally, there are a number of poems which Phaedrus has included because they are connected to the Aesopic fable genre as an "esoteric" genre, in which some object is shown to contain a secret or hidden meaning. Under this rubric we can include the several aetiological stories found in Phaedrus's poems, mostly clustered in Book IV:<sup>58</sup> why fires cannot be lit with a sacred flame,<sup>59</sup> the story of Prometheus and the confused creation of genders,<sup>60</sup> why female goats also have beards,<sup>61</sup> why dogs sniff each other's behinds,<sup>62</sup> why men lack the powers of animals,<sup>63</sup> and why the statue of Truth has no

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<sup>57</sup> Phaedrus 4.13 = Perry 569.

<sup>58</sup> It should be noted that the legendary Aesop was also connected with the telling of aetiological tales. Like fables and proverbs, this was another genre of storytelling that had a long-standing connection to Aesop. But this does not mean that the aetiological stories associated with Aesop were considered fables. For example, the aetiology of the skylark's crest, which is attributed to Aesop in Aristophanes (= Perry 447), is not included in any of the prose fable collections. The same is also true of the aetiological stories told in the *Life of Aesop*: Aesop's explanation of why men look at their excrement (Perry 380), and his explanation of the two types of dreams as a rivalry between Zeus and Apollo (Perry 385).

<sup>59</sup> Phaedrus 4.11 = Perry 513.

<sup>60</sup> Phaedrus 4.15-16 = Perry 515.

<sup>61</sup> Phaedrus 4.17 = Perry 516.

<sup>62</sup> Phaedrus 4.18 = Perry 78.

feet.<sup>64</sup> Phaedrus's account of why Hercules rejected "Wealth" also fits into this category,<sup>65</sup> along with two completely humorless poems based on allegorical modes of interpretation: Phaedrus's description of a statue of Kairos,<sup>66</sup> and a list of the figurative torments of the underworld,<sup>67</sup> along with another humorless religious poem in which the Delphic oracle decries the endless vices of mankind.<sup>68</sup>

While it is possible to find a more or less vague connection between all of these other poems and the Aesopic fable strictly understood, it is nevertheless clear that a large quantity of Phaedrus's poems fall outside of the Aesopic fable genre: 19 poems about legendary masters of wit and wisecracks, 2 short jokes and 5 long ones that have nothing in common with the form and function of fables, along with 9 allegorical and aetiological poems, for a total of 35 poems that are decidedly not fables, slightly more than a quarter of Phaedrus's extant 122 poems. Moreover, if Books I and II are set aside (as they both contain almost exclusively Aesopic fables),<sup>69</sup> then we find that of the 83 poems extant from Books III-V and the Appendix, 34 are not Aesopic fables, well over a third of the

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<sup>63</sup> Phaedrus Appendix 3 (no Perry number).

<sup>64</sup> Phaedrus Appendix 5-6 = Perry 535.

<sup>65</sup> Phaedrus 4.12 = Perry 111.

<sup>66</sup> Phaedrus 5.8 = Perry 530.

<sup>67</sup> Phaedrus Appendix 7 (no Perry number).

<sup>68</sup> Phaedrus Appendix 8 = Perry 536.

<sup>69</sup> In both Books I and II, Phaedrus remains much closer to the fable tradition: all of the poems in Book I are recognizably fables, and the same is true for what is left of Book II with the exception of the anecdote about Tiberius and the flatterer (2.5, = Perry 489).

total. This stands in sharp contrast to the collected fables of Babrius and Avianus, who do not show this tendency to deviate from the standard generic form of the fable. For reasons of personal preference, and perhaps also poetic ambition, Phaedrus was not content simply to write book after book of Aesopic fables; his personal predilections and aspirations were strong enough for him to stretch the limits of the genre. Moreover, even when dealing with traditional Aesopic materials, Phaedrus insisted on his own style of presentation, including the fables the more traditionally "Aesopic" stories of his earlier books.

### *The Absence of the Endomythia*

The most striking change in Phaedrus's versions of the fables is the diminished role of the endomythium. While most of the fables in the prose collections are equipped with endomythia in addition to the promythia or epimythia added by the editors, in Phaedrus the promythia and epimythia actually start to displace the endomythia. Thus, while most of the fables have either a promythium or an epimythium (but never both),<sup>70</sup> there are many fables lacking an endomythium. Consider, for example, Phaedrus's version of the fox and the crow and the cheese:<sup>71</sup>

Qui se laudari gaudet verbis subdolis  
fere dat poenas turpi paenitentia.  
Cum de fenestra corvus raptum caseum  
comesse vellet celsa residens arbore,

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<sup>70</sup> Unfortunately, the lack of verse promythia in the poems from Perotti's *Appendix* makes it impossible to generalize about this phenomenon with certainty.

<sup>71</sup> Phaedrus 1.13 = Perry 124, cited earlier on p. 16.



vulpes invidit, deinde sic coepit loqui:  
 "O qui tantum, corve, pennarum est nitor!  
 quantum decoris corpore et vultu geris!  
 si vocem haberes, nulla prior ales foret."  
 at ille stultus, dum vult vocem ostendere  
 lato ore emisit caseum; quem celeriter  
 dolosa vulpes avidis rapuit dentibus.  
 tum demum ingemuit corvi deceptus stupor.

He who takes delight in being flattered by deceitful speeches [*verbis subdolis*] is bound to be punished in shameful disgrace [*dat poenas turpi paenitentia*]. A crow had snatched a cheese from out of a window and sitting up high in a tree prepared to eat the cheese, but a fox greedily saw what was happening, and began to speak as follows: "O crow, how splendid are your feathers! What a graceful body you have and what a fine face! If only you had a voice to match, no bird would outrank you." And that foolish crow [*at ille stultus*], opened his mouth wide to display his voice and he dropped the cheese; the deceitful fox [*dolosa vulpes*] seized the cheese quickly with her greedy teeth, and only then did the astonished crow bewail [*ingemuit*] how he had been tricked.

This fable is a fine example of the "M-versus-R" type of fable, with the crow clearly marked as "M": *ille stultus*. Yet even though Phaedrus tells a story with a recognizably Aesopic plot, he does not provide an endomythium for the story, and instead concentrates on carefully linking his own author's promythium about the *dolis verbis* with the climax of the plot when the *dolosa vulpes* seizes the crow's cheese.

Yet even though Phaedrus has not chosen to include an endomythium in his version of the story, the narrative framework provides the opportunity for a perfectly Aesopic endomythium, as we can see by looking at the Greek prose version of the story:<sup>72</sup>

Korax kreas harpasas epi tinos dendrou ekathisen. alôpêx de theasamenê auton kai boulomenê tou kreôs perigenesthai stasa epêinei auton hôs eumegethê te kai kalon, legousa kai hôs prepei autôi malista tôn orneôn basileuein, kai touto pantôs

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<sup>72</sup> Perry 124.

an genoito, ei phônên eikhen. ho de parastêsai autêi theôn hoti kai phônên ekhei, balôn to kreas megala ekekrapei. ekeinê de prosdramousa kai to kreas harpasasa ephê "ô korax, kai phrenas ei eikhes, ouden an edeêsen eis to pantôn se basileuein."

A crow who had stolen some meat perched in a tree. A fox caught sight of him and, wishing to get the meat, stood there and began to praise the crow for his size and beauty, telling him that of all the birds he might most appropriately be king and that he certainly would be king if he had any kind of a voice. The crow wanted to show the fox that he did have a voice and as he began to croak he dropped the meat. The fox ran up, seized the meat, and said, "O crow, if you only had some wits [phrenas] about you, you would surely become king of all the animals."

The fox's rebuke of the foolish crow -- if you only had some wits about you -- is highly reminiscent of the fox's rebuke of the goat in the well, which we also saw in Chapter 1:<sup>73</sup>

tou de tragou memphomenou autên hôs tas homologias parabainousan, epistrapheisa eipen "ô houtos, all' ei tosautas phrenas eikhes hosas en tôi pôgônî trikhas, ou proteron dê katabebêkeis prin ê tèn anodon eskepsô."

When the goat complained that the fox was breaking their agreement, she turned around and said, "My good fellow, if your wits [phrenas] were as abundant as the hairs in your beard, you wouldn't have gotten down there before you thought about how you would get out."

In these two Greek prose fables, the fox pronounces an endomythium insulting the foolishness of her opponent, be it the crow or the goat. Yet if we turn to Phaedrus's version of the story of the fox and the goat and the well, we find that once again Phaedrus has omitted the endomythium from his version of the story:<sup>74</sup>

Homo in periculum simul ac venit callidus,  
reperire effugium quaerit alterius malo.

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<sup>73</sup> Perry 9.

<sup>74</sup> Phaedrus 4.9 = Perry 9.

cum decidisset vulpes in puteum inscia  
et altiore clauderetur margine,  
devenit hircus sitiens in eudem locum;  
simul rogavit, esset an dulcis liquor  
et copiosus. Illa fraudem moliens:  
descende, amice; tanta bonitas est aquae,  
voluptas ut satiari non possit mea.  
inmisit se barbatus. tum vulpecula  
evasit puteo, nixa celsis cornibus,  
hircumque clauso liquit haerentem vado.

When a clever man [*callidus*] gets into trouble, he seeks a way out at another man's expense [*alterius malo*]. A fox had unwittingly [*inscia*] fallen into a well, and was trapped by its high wall, but a thirsty goat came to the same place, and asked the fox whether the water was fresh and plentiful. The fox began laying her trap: "Come down, my friend; the water is so good that I cannot get enough of it myself." The bearded animal [*barbatus*] let himself down. Then the vixen leaped up on his high horns and got out of the pit, and left the goat behind, stuck inside the walled-up pool.

It is important to note that the moral of the story is not focused on the goat's foolishness but on the fox's wickedness: the fox is the *callidus* trickster who is the focus of the moral, while the goat is reduced to a colorless *alterius*. This stands in sharp contrast to the traditional form of the fable in which the goat's foolishness is rebuked by the fox, and which constitutes the point of the story, the negative exemplum that the fable would teach us to avoid.<sup>75</sup> Phaedrus has shifted the traditional moral focus of the story from the goat's foolishness to the fox's wickedness, and has removed the endomythium accordingly.

### ***Endomythia for Peacocks, Camels and Frogs***

Even when Phaedrus does not omit the endomythium, his use of abstract

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<sup>75</sup> Perry 9, cited on p. 9.

vocabulary makes even the endomythium start to sound like his own authorial epimythia. For an example of this blurring of the boundaries between the endomythium and epimythium, consider the fable of the peacock's complaint to the goddess Juno, in which the lengthy speech of the goddess trails off into Phaedrus's own epimythium.<sup>76</sup>

Pavo ad Iunonem venit indigne ferens,  
cantus luscini quod sibi non tribuerit;  
illum esse cunctis avibus admirabilem,  
se derideri, simul ac vocem miserit.  
Tunc consolandi gratia dixit dea:  
sed forma vincis, vincis magnitudine;  
nitor smaragdi collo praefulget tuo  
pictisque plumis gemmeam caudam explicas.  
Quo mi, inquit, mutam speciem, si vincor sono?  
Fatorum arbitrio partes sunt vobis datae:  
tibi forma, vires aquilae, luscinio melos,  
augurium corvo, laeva cornici omina,  
omnesque propriis sunt contentae dotibus.  
noli adfectare quod tibi non est datum,  
delusa ne spes ad querelam reccidat.

The peacock came to Juno complaining indignantly that the goddess had not given it the nightingale's song: the nightingale is admired by all the other birds when it sings but the peacock is laughed at [*se derideri*]. The goddess then spoke these words of consolation [*tunc consolandi gratia dixit dea*]: "But you are superior in beauty, and you are superior in size; there is an emerald splendor that shines about your neck, and you unfold a tail that is filled with jewels and painted feathers." The peacock said, "But what is the point of silent beauty, if I am defeated by my sound?" "Your portions have been given to you by the will of the Fates: you have beauty, the eagle has strength, the nightingale has music, the raven has prophecy, and unfavorable omens go to the crow, and all the birds are content with their lots." Do not strive for what has not been granted you [*noli adfectare quod tibi non est datum*], so that your disappointed hope will not relapse into discontent.

Given the humorless way in which Juno makes her argument, it is impossible to make a distinction between her pious sermon and the epimythium that Phaedrus has appended

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<sup>76</sup> Phaedrus 3.18 = Perry 509.

to the story. Presumably, the last two lines are Phaedrus's epimythium, yet there is no way to mark the break in terms of content: the last two lines could, in fact, be spoken by Juno to the peacock.<sup>77</sup> Usually, the endomythium of the fable can be easily distinguished from the epimythium by its witty qualities, but there is nothing funny here in what Juno has to say, and there is no real difference between her endomythium and what Phaedrus adds in the epimythium.

In fact, Phaedrus's story here about the peacock and the goddess is not really an Aesopic fable at all. In his versions of the "fox and the crow and the cheese" or "the fox and the goat in the well," Phaedrus has shifted the burden of the moral from the endomythium to the authorial promythium, depriving the animals of an opportunity to pronounce the witty last words of the fable. In this case, however, Phaedrus has gone much farther: he has substituted for the traditional plot of the Aesopic fable a colorless, uneventful, and highly rhetorical *declamatio*. To put it simply, nothing happens in this story: the peacock complains to Juno and Juno tells the peacock to stop complaining. There is no physical punishment, there is no verbal humiliation. In short, this encounter between the bird and the goddess doesn't really "feel" like a fable.

The difference between Phaedrus's story and a more traditional Aesopic fable can be seen quite clearly if we compare this scene between Juno and the peacock with a similar scene between Zeus and the camel:<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Postgate (1919), for example, punctuates the final two lines as if they belonged to Juno's speech.

<sup>78</sup> Perry 117. Because this fable is treated in Theon's *Progymnasmata*, it figures in van Dijk's inventory of "ancient theories" about the fable, 1997: 50, along with a list of

Kamêlos theasamenê tauron epi tois kerasin agallomenon, phthonêsasa autôi eboulêthê kai autê tôn isôn ephikesthai. dioper paragenomenê pros ton Dia toutou edeeto hopôs autêi kerata prosneimêi. kai ho Zeus aganaktêsas kat' autês, ei ge mê arkeitai tôi megethei tou sômatos kai têi iskui, alla kai perissoterôn epithumei, ou monon autêi kerata ou prosethêken, alla kai meros ti tôn ôtôn apheileto. Houtô polloi dia pleonexian tois allois epophthalmiôntes lanthanousi kai tôn idiôn steroumenoi.

A camel saw a bull with a fine set of horns. She was envious [*phthonêsas*] of them and decided to try to get a pair just like them. So she went to Zeus and asked him to give her horns. Zeus lost his temper with her [*aganaktêsas kat' autês*] for not being satisfied with her size and strength, but wanting something more, and not only didn't give her horns but even reduced the size of her ears. So it is that many men through greed suddenly find that they have lost what they did have while they have their eyes set on what others have.

In this case, as often in the Greek prose collections, the endomythium has been replaced by the epimythium; the story ends with the physical punishment of the foolish camel, but not the verbal humiliation that Zeus could easily have added into the bargain. If we turn to Avianus's version of the story, however, we find the authorial moralizing confined to the promythium, while the endomythium allows Jupiter to vituperate the camel, in addition to cropping its ears:<sup>79</sup>

Contentum propriis sapientem vivere rebus  
nec cupere alterius fabula nostra monet,  
indignata cito ne stet Fortuna recursu  
atque eadem minuat quae dedit ante rota.  
Corporis immensi fertur pecus isse per auras  
et magnum precibus sollicitasse Iovem:  
turpe nimis cunctis irridendumque videri,  
insignes geminis cornibus ire boves,  
et solum nulla munitum parte camelum  
obiectum cunctis expositumque feris.  
Iuppiter irridens postquam sperata negavit,

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many other ancient references to the story.

<sup>79</sup> Avianus 8 = Perry 117.

insuper et magnae sustulit auris onus.  
"vive minor merito, cui sors non sufficit," inquit,  
"et tua perpetuum, livide, damna geme."

Our fable warns that the wise man should live happily with what is his and not desire what belongs to others, so that Fortuna will not grow angry and run quickly backwards, taking away with the same wheel [*rota*] that which she formerly bestowed. They say that a large-bodied beast [*corporis immensi pecus*] went through the air and importuned the mighty Jupiter with his requests: everybody thought it a ghastly state of affairs and altogether laughable [*irridendum*] that the oxen went about marked by their twin horns while the camel alone is not defended in any part of its body, open and exposed to the attacks of wild beasts on all sides. Jupiter laughed at the camel [*irridens*] and then refused all that the camel had hoped for; moreover, he relieved the camel of the burden of its immense ears, saying "Live with less than you deserve, since you are not satisfied with your lot; you jealous creature [*livide*], lament your losses for all eternity."

Avianus's poem is a perfect example of the way in which an Aesopic fable can be reworked in a literary genre without losing its traditional Aesopic qualities. Avianus has put the story into verse, along with all kinds of stylistic features typical of the verse tradition in which he is writing, such as a periphrastic description of the camel as the beast with a large body, *corporis immensi pecus*.<sup>80</sup> Avianus has also inserted a moral, a promythium in this case, which is relevant to his own understanding of the fable in his own cultural context: the Wheel of Fortune, *rota Fortunae*, is extraneous to the ancient Aesopic tradition, but makes perfect sense in the cultural context of this late antique Latin author.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Phaedrus also resorts to the same sort of poetic diction, referring to the sheep as *laniger*, the wool-bearer, in 1.1.6 (= Perry 155), *laniger contra timens*, and referring to the goat as *barbatus*, the bearded one, in the story of the fox and the goat at the well, 4.9.10 (= Perry 9): *inmisit se barbatus*.

<sup>81</sup> Although there is a curious reference already in Phaedrus, linking Ixion's wheel in the underworld to Fortuna, Appendix 7.1-2 (no Perry number): *Ixion quod versari*

Even more importantly, Avianus's poem is permeated with the sense of "derision" that is characteristic of the Aesopic fable: the camel makes this ridiculous journey to heaven because he finds himself being ridiculed back on the earth. As the camel discovers, however, it was a mistake to complain about this to the god: the ridicule of Jupiter is far more dangerous than mere terrestrial abuse. When Jupiter laughs at the camel, there is nothing sympathetic in that laughter: the god laughs and he punishes.

The "ridiculousness" of the camel is an important factor in this animal's Aesopic career. In a Greek prose fable, we find a camel who makes a fool of herself by dancing in front of the other animals:<sup>82</sup>

En sunodôi tôn alogôn zôiôn pithêkos anastas ôrkheito. sphodra de autou eudokimountos kai hupo pantôn episêmainomenou, kamêlos phthonêsasa eboulêthê tôn autôn ephikesthai. dioper exanastasa epeirato kai autê orkheisthai. polla de autês atopa poiousês ta zôia aganaktêsanta rhopalois autên paionta exêlasan. Pros tous dia phthonon kreittosin hamillômenous, eita ek toutou sphallomenous, ho logos eukairos.

In the assembly of the dumb animals a monkey got up and danced. When he won everyone's admiration and was applauded by all the camel was jealous [*phthonêsasa*] and decided to win the same acclaim. Accordingly, she got up and tried her own skill at dancing. When she did this inappropriate thing [*atopa*], the other animals lost their tempers and drove her out with sticks. The fable can be applied well to those who, through their jealousy, try to compete with their betters and come to grief in the process.

This fable bears obvious resemblances to the story of the camel and Zeus: once again the camel is jealous (*phthonêsasa*), and when she tries to appropriate what does not belong to her, the animals get angry and punish her. In Babrius's version, however, the

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*narratur rota, / volubilem Fortunam iactari docet.*

<sup>82</sup> Perry 83.



plot is shifted to an "R-not-M" formula, in which the camel wisely refuses to engage in such ridiculous behavior.<sup>83</sup>

Kamêlon ênagkaze despotês pinôn  
orkheisth' hup' aulois aumbalois te khalkeiois.  
hê d' eip' "emoi genoito k'an hodôi bainein  
mê katagelaston, mêti purrikhên paizein."

The owner of a camel tried to make the camel dance to the flutes and bronze cymbals. The camel said, "It is hard enough for me to walk along the road without being laughed at [*mê katagelaston*], without pretending to be a Pyrrhic dancer."

The master wants his camel to make a fool of herself, but the camel wisely refuses to do so: she does not want to be a *katagelaston*, a source of ridicule to those around her. Babrius's little four-line poem is a fine example of how the endomythium can carry the full force of both the plot and the moral (just as in the Greek prose version of the belly and the feet, in which the endomythium served as both plot and moral<sup>84</sup>). As often, Babrius does not equip the fable with any supplementary promythium or epimythium; unlike Phaedrus, this poet often allows the endomythium to speak for itself.

Having considered these traditional Aesopic stories about the camel -- either the camel ridiculed by Zeus or the camel ridiculed (or almost ridiculed) by her fellow creatures -- it is now possible to see more clearly what has happened to Phaedrus's version of the peacock and Juno. As Phaedrus begins his account of the events, the

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<sup>83</sup> Babrius 80 = Perry 249. In the Greek prose version of the fable, the camel gets angry, *anagkazomena*, when her master orders her to dance. The camel thus takes over the "anger" that was associated with the "R" characters in the other fables about the jealous camel: Zeus in the story about the camel who is jealous of the bull's horns, and the animals at the assembly where the jealous camel tries to imitate the ape's dancing.

<sup>84</sup> Perry 130, cited on p. 101.

peacock is jealous of the nightingale because of his song and has already been subjected to humiliation by the other birds: "the nightingale was admired by all the other birds but the peacock was laughed at (*se derideri*) whenever it tried to sing." Up to this point, Phaedrus's poem can be compared to Avianus's version of the camel complaining to Zeus: in that poem, the camel was jealous of the bull because of his horns, and has been subjected to humiliation by the other animals. The difference resides in what happens when Phaedrus's goddess replies to the peacock. Instead of making fun of that foolish peacock, Phaedrus's Juno tries to gently reconcile the bird to his fate: *tunc consolandi gratia dixit dea*, "the goddess then spoke these words of consolation." In contrast, the first thing that Avianus's Jupiter does is to laugh at the camel: "Jupiter laughed at the camel (*irridens*) and then refused all that the camel had hoped for."

Phaedrus's version of the frogs who ask for a king is more traditional in tone, however, and here we do see a Jupiter who makes fun of the foolish animals while also punishing them for their mistake:<sup>45</sup>

Athenae cum florerent aequis legibus,  
 Procax libertas civitatem miscuit  
 Frenumque solvit pristinum licentia.  
 hic conspiratis factionum partibus  
 Arcem tyrannus occupat Pisistratus.  
 Cum tristem servitutem flerent Attici,  
 (Non quia crudelis ille, sed quoniam gravis  
 Omnino insuetis), onus et coepissent queri,  
 Aesopus talem tum fabellam rettulit.  
 Ranae vagantes liberis paludibus  
 Clamore magno regem petiere a Iove,  
 Qui dissolutos mores vi conpesceret.  
 Pater deorum risit atque illis dedit

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<sup>45</sup> Phaedrus 1.2 = Perry 44.

Parvum tigillum, missum quod subito vadi  
Motu sonoque terruit pavidum genus.  
Hoc mersum limo cum iaceret diutius,  
Forte una tacite profert e stagno caput  
Et explorato rege cunctas evocat.  
Illae timore posito certatim adnatant  
Lignumque supra turba petulans insilit.  
Quod cum inquinassent omni contumelia,  
Alium rogantes regem misere ad Iovem,  
Inutilis quoniam esset qui fuerat datus.  
Tum misit illis hydrum, qui dente aspero  
Corripere coepit singulas. Frustra necem  
Fugitant inertes, vocem praecludit metus.  
Furtim igitur dant Mercurio mandata ad Iovem,  
adflctis ut succurrat. Tunc contra deus:  
Quia nolulistis vestrum ferre, inquit, bonum,  
Malum perferte. Vos quoque, cives, ait,  
Hoc sustinete, maius ne veniat malum.

When Athens was flourishing with democratic laws, insolent liberty had disturbed the citizens, and license had relaxed the reins of former habit. Then as a result of the conniving of various factions, the tyrant Pisistratus took over the citadel. When the Athenians lamented their pitiable enslavement (not because their ruler was harsh, but because it is always burdensome for those not used to it), they began to lament their lot, so Aesop told them the following fable. The frogs, wandering at large in the free range of their marshes, loudly demanded that Jupiter give them a king, who could restrain their loose behavior by force. The father of the gods laughed [*risit*] and gave them a little stick, which he suddenly dropped down with a loud splash and stirring of the waters. The timid race of frogs was terrified. For a long time the stick lay submerged in the slime, then by chance a frog lifted his head from the marsh silently and then called upon all the frogs after having gotten to know the king. The rest of the frogs put aside their fear and quickly swam up to the stick and the impudent crowd jumped on top of it. With all sorts of insults they defiled the stick, and sent to Jupiter asking for another king because the king he had given them was useless. Then Jupiter sent them a water-snake, who began to snatch them one by one with its sharp fangs. In vain the sluggish frogs tried to escape their death; fear even put a stop to their speaking. Secretly then they sent messages to Jupiter by way of Mercury, asking him to help them in their suffering. The god responded thus: Because you didn't want to put up with something that was good for you, now you must put up with something bad. You too, citizens [*vos quoque, cives*], says Aesop, endure this situation, lest something worse ensue.

With his laugh (*risit*), Phaedrus's Jupiter shows himself to be of the same stock as the

laughing Jupiter in Avianus who punished the camel for making a foolish request. In fact, the story of the frogs is quite similar to the story of the camel complaining to Jupiter or the peacock complaining to Juno. In all three cases, the animals find themselves in an unbearable situation on earth, and they seek celestial redress for what they lack. The story of the frogs is more complicated, because Jupiter makes two responses to their pleas: the first response is laughter and the ridiculous offer of a piece of wood as a king; Jupiter's second response to the frogs is no longer laughter but wrath and punishment. In Avianus's story of the camel and Jupiter, the culminating moment of the story combines both ridicule and punishment in a single event when the god laughs and crops the camel's ears at the same time.

Phaedrus's Juno, on the other hand, does not even get angry at her peacock, much less punish or humiliate the bird for making a foolish request. In short, Phaedrus's Juno has wandered in from some other context: these are not the words, or the behaviors, of an Aesopic divinity. The Aesopic fable is not based on generosity, or kindness, or on gentle persuasion; the gods do not console. What seems most likely here is that Phaedrus must have started with a traditional Aesopic fable, one quite similar to Jupiter and the camel but told instead about Juno and the peacock. Phaedrus reproduces the opening of the fable, but then when the moralizing moment arrives, Phaedrus is not interested in following the traditional lines of the fable, with its witty endomythium and vicious rebuke. There is also an important formal difference in Phaedrus's epimythium, in which he addresses the reader directly with an imperative -- *noli adfectare quod tibi non est datum* -- while we would expect to find an indirect, third-person form. There is a third-

person plural form in the Greek prose version of Zeus and the camel uses the third-person plural ("so it is that many men through greed suddenly find...") and also in the story of the dancing camel ("those who, through their jealousy, try to compete with their betters..."), while Avianus's promythium to dancing camel uses the third-person singular ("the wise man should live happily with what is his"). This tendency to use third-person forms in the promythia and epimythia stands in contrast to the regular use of second-person and first-person forms of address in the endomythium when a character in the story either vituperates another character or vituperates himself. Phaedrus, however, often eliminates the endomythium and the dialogue that takes place within the world of the fable, and instead uses apostrophe to address his reader directly in the promythia and epimythia appended to the story.

By using second-person imperatives in this way, Phaedrus is positioning himself as the performer of the fable, with the reader as his audience. Just as Aesop explains his fable to the Athenians by speaking to them in the second-person (*vos quoque, cives*), Phaedrus also speaks to his reader, as if he had an actual awareness of his reader's situation and needs, and he could express the relevance of the fable not to people in general, but to his readers in particular. Thus, unlike the practice followed by the editors of the Greek prose collections (or the other authors of verse fables, such as Babrius and Avianus), Phaedrus directly addresses the reader in his promythia and epimythia. In fact, this dialogue between Phaedrus and his readers can even get somewhat nasty, when Phaedrus lets loose all the animosity and invective of the Aesopic tradition against the very persons who are reading his poems.

### ***Epimythia and Abuse: Phaedrus and His Readers***

Phaedrus's most boisterous attack on his readers is in his story of the fox, the dragon and the treasure.<sup>86</sup> In this poem, Phaedrus's epimythium diminishes in humor while it grows in size until in the end it emerges as an unchecked tirade against the poet's miserly, misguided audience:

Vulpes, cubile fodiens, dum terram eruit  
Agitque pluris altius cuniculos,  
Pervenit ad draconis speluncam intimam,  
Custodiebat qui thesauros abditos.  
Hunc simul aspexit: "Oro, ut inprudential  
Des primum veniam; deinde si pulchre vides,  
Quam non conveniens aurum sit vitae meae,  
Respondeas clementer. Quem fructum capis  
Hoc ex labore, quodve tantum est praemium,  
Ut careas somno et aevum in tenebris exigas?"  
"Nullum, inquit ille, verum hoc ab summo mihi  
love adtributum est." "Ergo nec sumis tibi  
Nec ulli donas quicquam?" "Sic Fatis placet."  
"Nolo irascaris, libere si dixerō:  
Dis est iratis natus qui est similis tibi."  
Abiturus illuc quo priores abierunt,  
Quid mente caeca miserum torques spiritum?  
Tibi dico, avare, gaudium heredis tui,  
Qui ture superos, ipsum te fraudas cibo,  
Qui tristis audis musicum citharae sonum,  
Quem tibi arum macerat iucunditas,  
Obsoniorum pretia cui gemitum exprimunt,  
Qui dum quadrantes aggeras patrimonio  
Caelum fatigas sordido periurio,  
Qui circumcidis omnem in pensam funeris,  
Libitina ne quid de tuo faciat lucri.

While excavating her den, a fox dug out the earth and made deeper and deeper burrows in the ground, and reached the remote cave of a dragon who was guarding a hidden treasure-trove. When the fox saw the dragon, she said: "First of all, I beg your pardon for this carelessness on my part [*oro, ut inprudential*

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<sup>86</sup> Phaedrus 4.21 = Perry 518.

*des primum veniam*]; but as you will kindly admit [*si pulchre vides*] that gold is not fitting for my way of life, please be so good as to tell me [*respondeas clementer*] what profit you gain from this work, and what reward could be so great that you neglect sleep and live out your life in the dark?" "I have no reward," the dragon said, "but this task was assigned to me by Jupiter on high." "Therefore you do not take anything for yourself nor give anything to anyone?" "This is the wish of the Fates." "I ask you to not be angry [*nolo irascaris*] if I speak freely: the man who is like you is born under the wrath of the gods [*dis est iratis natus qui est similis tibi*]." Since you are going to go to that place where those before you have gone, why do you torment your wretched spirit with blind ignorance [*mente caeca*]? I am speaking to you, you greedy man [*tibi dico, avar*], the joy of your heir, you who deprive the gods of incense and deprive yourself of food, you who hear the musical sound of the lyre gloomily [*tristis audis musicum citharae sonum*], you to whom the joyfulness of the flute brings only pain, you who groan at the cost of provisions, you who burden heaven with your filthy forswearing [*caelum fatigas sordido periurio*] while you pile up some paltry sum for your estate, you who cut back every expense for your funeral, so that the goddess of corpses should not take a penny of your profit.

This long and rather tedious poem is clearly far removed from the form of the Aesopic fable that we have come to expect. In place of the wit and charm of the Aesopic tradition, Phaedrus has devised here a different sort of invective that is relentlessly harsh and unappealing. In the case of Phaedrus's version of Juno and the peacock, a similar fable about Zeus and the camel allowed us to grasp the Aesopic thread which Phaedrus twisted to his own purposes, and in this case too there is another fable by Phaedrus that suggests what form the story of the fox and the dragon might have taken in a more traditional Aesopic version. In his first book of fables, Phaedrus tells the story of a dog who dies guarding a treasure, who is mocked by a vulture for his foolish mistake.<sup>87</sup>

Haec res avaris esse conveniens potest  
et qui humiles nati dici locupletes student.  
Humana effodiens ossa thesaurum canis  
invenit, et violarat quia Manes deos

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<sup>87</sup> Phaedrus 1.27 = Perry 483.

iniecta est illi divitiarum cupiditas,  
poenas ut sanctae religioni penderet.  
itaque aurum dum custodit oblitus cibi,  
fame est consumptus. quem stans vulturius super  
fertur locutus. O canis, merito iaces,  
qui concupisti subito regales opes,  
trivio conceptus, educatus stercore.

This event can be fittingly applied to greedy men and those who strive to be called wealthy even though they are of humble birth. While digging amongst human bones, a dog found a treasure and because he had violated the Di Manes he was subjected to a desire for wealth so that he might pay the penalty due to the sanctity of the cult. Thus while he guarded his gold he lost all thought of food, and died of hunger. A vulture standing over him is reported to have said: O dog, it is right that you lie here [*merito iaces*], as you wanted to acquire a king's bounty instantaneously, although you were conceived at the crossroads and raised in manure [*trivio conceptus, educatus stercore*].

After the dog's death, the vulture arrives as an interloper to pronounce the moral of the story. Similarly, the fox also seems to be an "interloper" in the story of the fox and the dragon as well, although the dragon has not suffered any kind of punishment comparable to what the dog suffers in this fable, and the rebuke offered by the fox (*dis est iratis natus qui est similis tibi*) can hardly compare to the vicious invective of the vulture: *merito iaces...trivio conceptus, educatus stercore*.

In fact, one of the most unusual qualities of Phaedrus's fable of the fox and the dragon is the way in which the characters speak to one another. The characters in Aesopic fables are usually very vicious, freely insulting one another with witty ripostes, especially in the endomythium, when the verbal rebuke of the foolish character's mistake becomes the climax of the story. In this fable, however, the animals speak to each other in a stilted and formal way: *Oro ut imprudentiae / des primum veniam*, says the fox to the dragon, *respondeas clementer, nolo irascaris*, and so on. This is not the discourse



one expects from an Aesopic fable, in which *venia* and *clementia* are rarely found, and anger is the usual *modus operandi*. Again, just as Phaedrus's Juno did not laugh at the peacock, or even get angry at the foolish bird, here the characters in the story make no displays of boisterous wit or vicious anger.

Yet, while the animals in this story are unexpectedly polite to one another, Phaedrus's attitude towards his own reader is extravagantly abusive,<sup>88</sup> accusing him of being stupid (*mente caeca*) and greedy (*avare!*), failing to appreciate the arts (*tristis audis musicum citharae sonum*) and lacking respect for the gods (*caelum fatigas sordido periurio*). Phaedrus thus expands the usual brevity of the epimythium, and he also colors it with an invective tone that is alien to the epimythia of the Greek prose tradition. The editors of the Greek prose fables used the epimythium to "decode" the meaning of the fable and its application, not to attack their own readers in an outburst of bile and contempt: in a traditional Aesopic fable the invective abuse is confined the endomythium, while the editorial commentary of the epimythium is usually very neutral (and even rather positive) in tone. In contrast, Phaedrus has taken the rancor and animosity which is usually characteristic of the fable's endomythium and adapted that critical tone (without any of the humor) to his own address to the reader in the epimythium.

Of course, Phaedrus is not always so hard on his readers. In other cases he seems

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<sup>88</sup> Perry suggests something of this in his study of the promythia and epimythia in Phaedrus (1940: 415): "By the words *se...sentiat* Phaedrus addresses himself to an imaginary culprit in a moral tone, as if he were giving us an epimythium, instead of disinterestedly telling a learned reader how his fable might be used."

to conceive of the epimythium as a space for an (imagined) dialogue between the author and the reader, as in this poem about a donkey and the pig's barley:<sup>89</sup>

Quidam inmolasset verrem cum sancto Herculi,  
Cui pro salute votum debebat sua,  
Asello iussit reliquias poni hordei.  
Quas aspernatus ille sic locutus est:  
"Libenter istum prorsus adpeterem cibum,  
Nisi, qui nutritus illo est, iugulatus foret."  
Huius respectu fabulae deterritus,  
Periculosum semper vitavi lucrum.  
Sed dicis, "Qui rapuere divitias, habent."  
Numeremus agedum qui deprensi perierunt.  
Maiorem turbam punitorum reperies.  
Paucis temeritas est bono, multis malo.

After having sacrificed a pig to the blessed Hercules, to whom he was in debt for the fulfillment of a prayer for his health, a man then ordered the remainder of the pig's barley to be given to the donkey. But the donkey refused the leftovers and said: "I would have a willing appetite for that food if the creature who had been feeding on it had not had his throat cut." Alarmed by the prospect presented in this fable, I have always avoided perilous gain. But you say, "Those who manage to seize wealth, keep it." Well then, let's you and I count up the number who have been caught in the act and perished. You will find that the greater crowd is made up of those who are caught and punished. To a few, rashness may be a good thing, but for many it is nothing good [*paucis temeritas est bono, multis malo*].

Although Phaedrus's address to the reader is not implacably hostile in this poem, there is still a dispute between the author and the reader, a dispute which Phaedrus insists on winning. Once again, the "dialogic" quality that usually resides inside the traditional Aesopic fable, has slipped outside the fable: the dialogue no longer takes place between

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<sup>89</sup> Phaedrus 5.4 = Perry 526. This is another incongruous fable in that the horse really should eat the pig's barley: there is nothing wrong with the barley after all. But as in the story of the pregnant woman who refuses to lie in bed (Phaedrus 1.18 = Perry 479, cited on p. 33), the horse who refuses to eat the barley makes it possible to tell an elegant endomymthium, a witty moral to the story that makes perfect sense when applied to the real world.

characters in the story but between the author and his readers. The conversational style of Phaedrus's epimythium is quite unlike what we find in the Greek prose collections in which the epimythium was never intended as a space in which to debate about the correctness or incorrectness of the fable's conclusion. This, however, is precisely what Phaedrus does, arguing with an imaginary reader about whether the fable is credible. Moreover, this dialogue with the reader is marked by the conversational use of "dicis" and "agedum," simulating the illusion of a verbal exchange. In the end, of course, it is Phaedrus who finally pronounces the definitive moral of the story: *paucis temeritas est bono, multis malo*. Even in a dialogue, Phaedrus has to have the last word. The reader may propose a few (*paucis*) counter-examples, but it is Phaedrus who claims to speak for the majority: he can give advice to the many (*multis*) because of his ultimate authority in interpreting the story that he has chosen as the subject matter for his poem. The presence of Phaedrus as a speaking "ego" in the epimythium to this poem is completely unprecedented in the traditional epimythia of the Greek prose collections; the persons who wrote those epimythia never asserted themselves as persons, but simply hid behind the anonymity of their editorial function. Phaedrus, however, is not merely an editor commenting on a collection of fables; he is an author, a writer, who is interpreting these fables for his audience, and he is ready to present himself, an *ego* in the first-person singular, to defend the authority of his interpretation.

### ***Epimythia and Riddles: Esoteric Interpretations***

It is precisely the level of interpretation that distinguishes the endomythium of a

fable from the promythium or epimythium that is appended to it. The endomythium, the moral within the fable, is a pronouncement (usually a denunciation) of the story's outcome; it is meant to be self-evident, rather than the result of any intervening interpretation. The promythium and epimythium, on the other hand, evolved as editorial interpretations of the meaning of the story and, more specifically, as interpretations of the endomythium. Phaedrus does, in fact, use the promythium and epimythium in this way in some of his poems, offering a brief interpretation in which he explains how the figurative world of the fable can be applied to the human concerns of Roman society. Yet Phaedrus can also adopt a more self-aggrandizing attitude, expanding the length of the commentary so that it becomes more like a sermon (as in the fable of the dragon and the treasure, or the donkey and his barley) rather than a quick and witty solution of the fable's cryptic riddle.

Even more importantly, Phaedrus is also willing to claim that his commentary, the epimythium, is a privileged interpretation which *only* the author of the poem can provide, and which is thus superior in value to the endomythium itself. Without an endomythium, the fable takes on an increasingly hermetic quality, becoming more and more like an allegory which only the privileged few, or the explicitly initiated, are able to understand, and then only in conjunction with the story's author and the commentary that he provides.<sup>90</sup> Consider, for example, the notoriously cryptic epimythium which

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<sup>90</sup> I would thus disagree with Bloomer's assertion that "allegory [is not] a significant technique for the fables of Phaedrus" (1997: 77). It is true that Phaedrus does not offer allegorical readings of traditional fables (as will commonly happen in the Christian versions of the stories in the Middle Ages; see Chapters 4 and 5), but it is also true that Phaedrus himself was attracted to the genre of allegorical writing, and on this basis he

Phaedrus appends to the story of the old woman and the jar, the programmatic opening poem for his third book of fables:<sup>91</sup>

Anus iacere vidit epotam amphoram,  
Adhuc Falerna faece e testa nobili  
Odorem quae iucundum late spargeret.  
Hunc postquam totis avida traxit naribus:  
"O suavis anima, quale in te dicam bonum  
Antehac fuisse, tales cum sint reliquiae!"  
Hoc quo pertineat dicet qui me noverit.

An old woman saw a wine jar that had been drained empty; but with the Falernian lees it still sent forth a pleasant odor from the noble container. The greedy woman deeply inhaled the odor, and then said: "Oh sweet spirit, when even your traces are of such quality, what quality you must have had before!" The one who knows me [*qui me noverit*] will say what this refers to.

In this case, the addition of the epimythium does nothing to clarify the meaning of the endomythium pronounced by the old woman; instead, it is a taunt to the reader's ignorance. By itself, the endomythium is apparently open to all manner of interpretations: one person might read the old woman's words as a figure for the lingering charms that are left of life even in old age (but with an ironic edge, given Roman prejudices against women, especially old women, not to mention old women who drink),<sup>92</sup> someone else could read the poem as a meditation on the greatness of character that remains even after a person has fallen from power, while yet another person might find here a sentimental longing for the cultural past, invoking the pleasures of archaic poetry that survive only in fragments -- or perhaps the old woman is voicing a fondness

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included allegorical poems in his books.

<sup>91</sup> Phaedrus 3.1 = Perry 493.

<sup>92</sup> See, for example, the old woman in Plautus's *Curculio*, lines 110 ff.

for the Republican life that only dimly lingers on in the debauched Imperial period.<sup>93</sup>

Yet despite these many possible interpretations, Phaedrus's epimythium puts a stop to such speculation: there is one "answer" to the riddle of this poem, he declares, but to discover that authorized and correct answer we must ask someone who "knows the poet."<sup>94</sup> The endomythium, without the author, is not enough. This reduction in the possible meanings of a story stands in sharp contrast to the traditional mechanism of the Aesopic fable itself: Aesopic fables were meant to apply in all sorts of possible situations, and this "flexibility" of adaptation was a major factor in their popular success. There was no point in limiting the ways in which an Aesopic fable could be interpreted; the more ways in which it could be interpreted meant the more occasions on which it could be repeated, and hence the greater likelihood that the fable would survive over time. For Phaedrus, however, this popular dynamic of interpretation and usage is irrelevant; as the author of these fables, Phaedrus also wants to control and delimit their interpretation. This tendency towards an esoteric hermeticism in Phaedrus's poetry pushes his Aesopic fables more and more in the direction of allegory, and it is surely no

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<sup>93</sup> This political reading is Havet's; for an inventory of this and other readings, see Perry's note to the poem (1965: 258-259)

<sup>94</sup> Needless to say, the efforts to build biographies of Phaedrus based on the total lack of evidence which we face has led various scholars to read many of the fables as allegories of the poet's life, as ways to "know" the poet. See, for example, Solinas's recent edition of the poems (1992: xxiv) in which he speculates about poem 3.15 (= Perry 506) as an allegory of Phaedrus's childhood: the little lamb raised by adopted parents is none other than Phaedrus himself. Havet (1895: 261) considered the dog in 1.27 (= Perry 483), *trivio conceptus, educatus stercore*, to be an allusion to Phaedrus's birth and upbringing.

coincidence that Phaedrus in fact includes various allegories in his books of fables.<sup>95</sup>

Phaedrus's insistence on his personal and private interpretations of the poems is most explicit in an aetiological fable about why lamps are not lit from the sacred fires of temples.<sup>96</sup> At the end of this solemn poem, in which Religio herself is the principle speaker, Phaedrus explicitly claims for himself as author the exclusive authority to interpret the moral of the story.<sup>97</sup>

Lucernam fur accendit ex ara Iovis  
Ipsumque conpilavit ad lumen suum.  
Onustus qui sacrilegio cum discederet,  
Repente vocem sancta misit Religio:  
"Malorum quamvis ista fuerint munere  
Mihique invisā, ut non offender subripi,  
Tamen, scelestē, spiritu culpam lues,  
Olim cum adscriptus venerit poenae dies.  
Sed ne ignis noster facinori praeluceat,  
Per quem verendos excolit pietas deos,  
Veto esse tale luminis commercium."  
Itaque hodie nec lucernam de flamma deum  
Nec de lucerna fas est accendi sacrum.  
Quot res contineat hoc argumentum utiles  
Non explicabit alius quam qui repperit.  
significat primum saepe quos ipse alueris  
Tibi inveniri maxime contrarios;  
Secundum ostendit scelera non ira deum,  
Fatorum dicto sed puniri tempore;  
Novissime interdicat ne cum malefico  
Usum bonus consociet ullius rei.

A thief lit his lamp from Jupiter's altar and then robbed the god by the light of his own fire. When he left, laden with sacrilege, holy Religio herself suddenly

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<sup>95</sup> For example, Phaedrus provides a description of an allegorical statue of *Occasio* in 5.8 (= Perry 530), and a list of allegorical torments in the Underworld in Appendix 7 (no Perry number).

<sup>96</sup> Phaedrus 4.11 = Perry 513.

<sup>97</sup> For aetiological materials in the Aesopic tradition, see Perry (1962).

began to speak: "Although those gifts which I hate were brought by wicked men (such that I am not offended by their theft), it is still true that you will pay the penalty in spirit, you villain, when that day of punishment which is written for you arrives [*olim cum venerit dies*]. But so that our fire, which allows piety to venerate the awesome gods, may not serve to light the path of crime, I forbid all such traffic in light." Thus today it is not allowed to light a lantern from the flame sacred to the gods or for the sacred fire to be lit from a lantern. How many useful things this illustration contains only the author who found it can explain to you, and no one else [*non explicabit alius quam qui repperit*]. First of all, it shows that often those whom you yourself have nourished prove to be most inimical to you; second, it shows that crimes are not punished by the wrath of the gods but at the time pronounced by the Fates; finally, it forbids the good man to share in the use of anything with an evildoer.

As in the story of the fox and the dragon and the treasure, Phaedrus's poem does not succeed as an Aesopic fable: although the thief has certainly made a mistake of sorts, he does not apparently suffer any personal punishment as a result. Religio exclaims: "you will pay the penalty in spirit, you villain!, when that day of punishment which is written for you arrives," *olim cum venerit dies*. As we have seen before, Phaedrus's rhetoric is far removed from the tradition of the Aesopic fable, which is not a world of *olim*, of some day, but a world of *nunc*, now (*nunc demum intelligo*, as the deer exclaimed while being torn to death by the dogs<sup>98</sup>). The day of punishment is not "yet to arrive" in Aesop; it is always already here. In a traditional Aesopic fable, we would see the punishment inflicted on that thief, and hear his groans of pain.

In the same way that the plot of this fable is far removed from the world of Aesop, the same can be said for Phaedrus's interpretive posture. Phaedrus declares himself the only source of interpretation for this poem: just as it is only someone who

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<sup>98</sup> Phaedrus 1.12 = Perry 74, cited on p. 28.



knows the poet who will say (*dicet*) what the old woman and the wine jar means,<sup>99</sup> here it is only the poet who will explain (*explicabit*) the meaning of this particular aetiological tale. In this case, however, Phaedrus does not withhold the meaning from his reader; instead, he unfolds a series of interpretations, all of which are "authorized" by the author himself (*non alius quam qui repperit*, which is to say, the author).<sup>100</sup> The radical openness of the Aesopic endomythium, whose figurative language is meant to apply to an unlimited variety of human situations, is here itemized -- and restricted -- by the author's approved interpretations. Whereas the Aesopic genre depends on the wit of the audience to "get it," Phaedrus instead insists that the fable must be explicated by the author: *et non explicabit alius*.

## Part Two: Justice and Injustice in Phaedrus's Fables

As we saw already in Chapter 1, Aesopic fables are based not a theory of ethics, but on the punishment of a mistake: the winner is always right, and the loser (the character who loses his supper, his money, his dignity, his life) must be in the wrong. The loser is wrong because he loses, and he loses because he is wrong. Losers are losers: the circular point of these fables does not depend on who is right or wrong in an

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<sup>99</sup> Phaedrus 3.1 = Perry 493.

<sup>100</sup> Likewise, Phaedrus sometimes cites a fable, and then rejects the fable's moral as being untrue. Consider, for example, 2.1 (= Perry 487), the lion who shares his booty with the virtuous man: *Exemplum egregium prorsus et laudabile; verum est aviditas dives et pauper pudor*, "it is an altogether praiseworthy and laudable example; but the truth is that greed amasses riches and honorable behavior leads only to poverty." Phaedrus, as often, has the last word, and makes a claim to truth that actually contradicts the *argumentum* of the fable itself.

ethical sense, but on who is right or wrong in a practical sense. Phaedrus, on the other hand, tends to shift this traditional master narrative -- the story of a mistake and its punishment -- away from a practical focus on the consequences of the mistake to a more abstract focus on ethical behavior. For Phaedrus, the question is not always who is right or wrong in practical terms, but who is right or wrong in an ethical sense. Phaedrus's commitment to what is "morally" right or wrong is most evident in the programmatic opening fable of his first book of poems, the story of the wolf and the lamb at the stream:<sup>101</sup>

Ad rivum eundem lupus et agnus venerant,  
 Siti compulsi. superior stabat lupus,  
 Longeque inferior agnus. tunc fauce improba  
 Latro incitatus iurgii causam intulit:  
 "Cur" inquit "turbulentam fecisti mihi  
 Aquam bibenti?" laniger contra timens:  
 "Qui possum, quaeso, facere quod quereris, lupe?  
 A te decurrit ad meos haustus liquor."  
 Repulsus ille veritatis viribus  
 "Ante hos sex menses male" ait "dixisti mihi."  
 Respondit agnus "Equidem natus non eram."  
 "Pater hercle tuus" ille inquit "male dixit mihi."  
 Atque ita correptum lacerat iniusta nece.  
 Haec propter illos scripta est homines fabula  
 Qui fictis causis innocentes opprimunt.

Driven by thirst a wolf and a lamb came to drink at the same stream, with the wolf standing upstream, and the lamb a good ways downstream. Then the thieving beast, prompted by his villainous gullet, made an accusation against the lamb: "Why are you muddying my water?" The timid wooly creature [*laniger*] responded, "But how could I be guilty of this charge, O wolf? The stream runs down from you to where I am drinking." Rebuffed by the force of the truth [*veritatis vires*] contained in the lamb's words, the wolf said: "You insulted me six months ago." The lamb replied, "But I hadn't even been born six months ago." The wolf said, "By god, then it was your father who insulted me." And

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<sup>101</sup> Phaedrus 1.1 = Perry 155.

so he snatched the lamb and butchered him, a case of unjustifiable slaughter [*iniusta nece*]. This fable is written with regard to those men [*propter illos*] who victimize innocent persons on false charges [*qui fictis causis innocentes opprimunt*].

Here Phaedrus shows himself to be interested not so much in the story of a mistake and its correction (the traditional narrative of the Aesopic genre), but instead in the story of injustice and its victims. The conflict is between truth (*veritatis vires*) and lies (*qui fictis causis innocentes opprimunt*); the outcome is fatal for the lamb, but the lamb's slaughter is unjust, *iniusta nece*, and the wolf is clearly the guilty party. This vocabulary of truth and justice is quite alien to the Aesopic tradition, but Phaedrus makes it central to his project by putting this poem at the head of his first book of fables.<sup>102</sup>

By focusing on the wolf as the negative object of the fable's message, Phaedrus is not following the traditional Aesopic model of interpretation, even though the plot -- in which one animal devours another after some amusing dialogue -- is recognizably Aesopic.<sup>103</sup> The difference between Phaedrus's presentation of the story has to do with

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<sup>102</sup> This same conflict can be traced in Hesiod's fable of the hawk and the nightingale (= Perry 4; for all the ancient testimony, see van Dijk, 1997: 443-459). In this case, the endomythium has the hawk address the nightingale as a fool, revealing that this is a traditional "R-versus-M" fable in which the hawk is "R" character and the nightingale is "M" (punished verbally by the hawk, and physically assaulted by him). It is not clear, however, whether Hesiod does not intend to criticize the unjust action of the hawk, in much the same way that Phaedrus uses the epimythium to turn the force of his fable about the lamb and the wolf against the unjust action of the wolf.

<sup>103</sup> Compare the Dipi-jataka version of the story (in Cowell, III.285-286) which combines two different versions of the story: the small animal destroyed by the larger predator, and the small animal who fools the larger predator. In the "story of the past," a goat strays from the flock and is caught by a panther; the goat tries to persuade the panther, in a dialogue almost identical to the story of the lamb and the wolf at the stream. The panther, however, is not persuaded and eats the goat. In the "story of the present," however, the goat runs up and unexpectedly attacks the panther, who is so surprised that

his separation of ethical blame from the story of a mistake and its punishment. The wolf is the negative focus of the story, but he has not made a recognizable mistake, and he is not punished for anything in the plot of the story. It is the lamb who loses his life, while the wolf is the obvious winner. Thus, the story offers no evidence for the wolf having made any sort of practical mistake; his only failure is moral. This means that Phaedrus cannot blame the wolf for being foolish; he can only blame the wolf... for being a wolf.

The contrast between Phaedrus's stance in this poem and the usual Aesopic attitude becomes more clear if we compare Phaedrus's poem to a traditional Aesopic fable based on a similar situation. This time it is a young kid rather than a lamb who has been captured by a wolf. The situation might look hopeless, but in the world of Aesop there is no rule that the wolf must win. In fact, this seemingly defenseless kid, unlike Phaedrus's lamb, succeeds in tricking the wolf who has him in his grasp, and thus escapes with his life, leaving the wolf to bemoan his own foolishness:<sup>104</sup>

Eriphos husterêsas apo poimnês hupo lukou katediôketo. epistrapheis de ho eriphos legei tôi lukôi "pepeismai, luke, hoti son brôma eimi: all' hina mê adoxôs apothanô, aulêson, hopôs orkhêsômai." aulountos de tou lukou kai orkhoumenou

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the goat is able to escape to the safety of the flock.

<sup>104</sup> Perry 97. There is also a similar "Aesopic" fable from Eskimo folklore, cited in Kennerly (1983: 153): "An owl saw a lemming just outside his hole which he wanted to eat. He shouted to the lemming that there were hunters coming, so the lemming approached the owl's hole as if he would rather be eaten by the owl than killed by hunters. But first the lemming made a request: "I am very fat, and you can have a good meal. Take me! And if you wish to celebrate before eating me, I will sing while you dance." The lemming began to sing, and the owl began to dance, rocking back to and fro, staring up in the sky and enjoying himself. And as the owl kicked up his legs farther and farther apart, the lemming seized his chance and ran inside the owl's hole. The owl pleaded with the lemming to come back out of the hole but the lemming just stuck his head out long enough to throw dirt in the owl's face."

tou eriphou, hoi kunes akousantes ediôkon ton lukon. epistrapheis de ho lukos legei tôi eriphôi "tauta emoi kalôs ginetai: edei gar me makellarion onta aulêtên mê mimeisthai." Houtôs hoi para gnômên tou kairou ti Prattontes kai hôn khersin ekhousin husterountai.

A kid had lagged behind the flock and was set upon by a wolf. The kid turned around and said to the wolf, "I'm sure that I'm to be your dinner, but just so that I won't die ignominiously, play a tune on your flute for me to dance to." While the wolf played, the kid danced, the dogs heard and chased the wolf away. The wolf turned back and said to the kid, "This is what I deserve [*tauta emoi kalôs ginetai*]; a butcher like me shouldn't try to play the flute." So it is that people do something without thinking about its appropriateness, while neglecting the business that is at hand.

In this typical Aesopic fable, a powerful wolf is tricked by a smooth-talking kid. Although he is strong, the wolf turns out to be foolish, and in the endomythium he castigates himself for his stupid mistake, accepting the punishment he has brought down upon himself. The wolf's confessional "This is what I deserve" is a formula we have seen already in many Aesopic fables, including some poems of Phaedrus (recall the birds who chose the voracious kite to be their king: *merito plectimur*, "we deserve our punishment").<sup>105</sup> In this Greek prose fable, the editor does not dwell on the wolf's moral character (as Phaedrus does in his poem about the wolf and the lamb), nor does the editor call attention to the wolf's physical force or brute strength. Instead, the epimythium of this story focuses on the stupidity of the wolf: the wolf did something inappropriate, and consequently lost the profit that he had already in his grasp. The moral of the story is not that we should respect sweet little goats and let them go; the

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<sup>105</sup> For other uses of this formula in Phaedrus, consider the dog who loses his meat while greedily snapping at his reflection (1.4 = Perry 133: *amittit merito proprium qui alienum appetit*) and the words of the vulture to the dog who died guarding his treasure (1.27 = Perry 483: *O canis, merito iaces*).

moral of the story is that we shouldn't even listen to what the little goats try to say to us wolves. The editor in fact focuses entirely on the wolf's foolishness, while not making any laudatory comment about the admirable intelligence of the kid.

In Phaedrus, however, the wolf is not presented as a ridiculous and foolish character who might be tricked by the lamb and live to regret it -- no, for Phaedrus, the wolf is simply a villain. Yet because Phaedrus does not present the wolf as a fool, and because he is also reluctant to present the lamb as a fool, there is no focal point for the expected Aesopic "foolishness" in Phaedrus's poem. Without the requisite foolish mistake, there is no way for either character, the lamb or the wolf, to pronounce the typical Aesopic endomythium. The endomythium is the place where the "mistake" is identified and rebuked; if there is no "mistake" to castigate, there can be no endomythium. In place of an endomythium, Phaedrus offers his own editorial commentary, simulating the presence of an endomythium in the wolf's final riposte to the lamb: "your father cursed me," he says before eating the lamb. Yet this riposte does not express the moral of the story and the wolf's final words do not actually distinguish themselves in any way from the preceding lines of dialogue. Although the wolf's words close out the fable, they are not an endomythium; they do not express the moral of the story. For the moral of the story. For the moral we must turn away from the characters in the story, and look instead to Phaedrus's epimythium.

In the Greek prose version of "the lamb and the wolf at the stream," however, the wolf is able to pronounce an endomythium which does express the moral of the story. The wolf recognizes that it would be a foolish thing to listen to the lamb, and he stops

himself before he makes the potential mistake ("R-not-M").<sup>106</sup>

Lukos theasamenos arna apo tinos potamou pinonta, touton eboulêthê met' eulogou aitias katathoinêsasthai. dioper stas anôterô êitiato auton hôs tholounta to hudôr kai piein auton mê eônta. tou de legontos hôs akrois tois kheilesi pinei kai allôs ou dunaton katôterô hestôta epanô tarassein to hudôr, ho lukos apotukhôn tautês tês aitias ephê "alla perusi ton patera mou eloidorêsas." eipontos de ekeinou mêd' epeteion gegenêsthai, ho lukos ephê pros auton "ean su apologiôn euporêis, egô se ou katedomai;"

A wolf saw a lamb drinking from a river and decided to find a reasonable indictment for making a meal of him. So from where he stood upstream he began to complain that the lamb was muddying the water and not letting him get a drink. When the lamb said that he was no more than touching the water with his lips and that besides, from where he was standing downstream, he couldn't possibly disturb the water above him, the wolf, failing in this indictment, said, "But last year you made unpleasant remarks about my father." Then, when the lamb said he wasn't even a year old, the wolf said to him, "Even if you can come up with all sorts of fine excuses, why would I ever choose to not eat you up?"

In this version of "the lamb and the wolf at the stream," the wolf is able to summarize the plot of the story in terms of a mistake, in this case, a mistake prevented: "Even if you come up with all sorts of fine excuses," says the wolf, "why would I ever choose to not eat you up?" The wolf acknowledges here the mistake that he might make (being distracted from his dinner by the lamb's persistent rhetoric), and he then proudly declares that he will not be tricked into making this mistake.

The endomythium pronounced by the wolf in this prose version of the story is essentially repeated in Babrius's poetic version, where the wolf once again denounces the

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<sup>106</sup> Perry 155. Compare an almost identical endomythium in Perry 16, in which a cat catches a rooster and wants to find a plausible reason for eating him. He first accuses the rooster of not letting men sleep (but that is to keep men from being lazy), and then of committing unnatural acts with his sisters and mother (but that is just to produce more eggs and chickens for his owners), and in the end the indignant cat exclaims, "Am I to forgo eating you just because you always have some plausible excuse?"

foolish mistake he would make if he let the talkative lamb escape.<sup>107</sup>

Lukos pot' arna peplanêmenon poimnês  
idôn biêi men ouk epêlthen harpaxôn,  
egklêma d' ekhthrês euprosôpon ezêtei.  
"su dê me perusi mikros ôn eblasphêmeis."  
"egô se perusin; ouk ep' etos egennêthên."  
"oukoun su tên arouran hên ekhô keireis;"  
"oupô ti khlôron ephagon oud' eboskêthên."  
"oud' ara pêgên ekpepôkas hên pinô;"  
"thêlê methuskei mekhri nun me mêtrôiê."  
tote dê ton arna sullabôn te kai trôgôn  
"all' ouk adeipnon" eipe "ton lukon thêseis,  
k'an eukherôs mou pasan aitiên lusêis."

Once a wolf saw a lamb that had gone stray from the flock, but instead of rushing upon him to seize him by force, he tried to find a plausible complaint by which to justify his hostility. "Last year, small though you were, you slandered me." "How could I last year? It's not yet a year since I was born." "Well then, aren't you cropping this field, which is mine?" "No, for I've not yet eaten any grass not have I begun to graze." "And haven't you drunk from the fountain which is mine to drink from?" "No, even yet my mother's breast provides my nourishment." Thereupon the wolf seized him and while devouring the lamb he said [*trôgôn eipe*]: "You're not going to rob the wolf of his dinner even though you do find it easy to refute all my charges."

Unlike Phaedrus, Babrius provides us with that perfect Aesopic combination of physical assault and verbal insult: the wolf pronounces his insulting "last words" in the very act of consuming the lamb, "devouring the lamb, he said..." This is the quintessential Aesop: a moral with teeth. In the "eat or be eaten" world of the Aesopic fable, the wolf is eating, and the lamb is being eaten, an outcome that demonstrates very clearly just who

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<sup>107</sup> Babrius 89 = Perry 155. Babrius very rarely engages in the kind of authorial editorializing that characterizes Phaedrus's versions of the fables. Although Babrius puts the fables into verse, he adopts the rhetorical posture that was typical of the prose editors of the stories, adding only brief epimythia to the poems. Crusius, in fact, considered all these epimythia to be spurious, added by someone after Babrius, and he bracketed them all in his edition. Perry, on the other hand, considers at least some of these brief epimythia to be written by Babrius (1965).



is right and who, alas, is wrong. Admittedly, the wolf is morally wrong (it is certainly not the case that Babrius and the Greek prose version are defending the wolf's moral virtues!), but regardless of his criminality the wolf is "right" when it matters the most: in the struggle to survive, the wolf is the winner -- and Aesopic fables award no consolation prize for second place. If we want to learn a lesson from this fable, the wolf has something to teach us (i.e., if your strength is in your teeth, don't let the tongues of weaker creatures dissuade you!), but there is really nothing we can learn from the honest little lamb, unless we need lessons in how to be eaten by wolves.

Phaedrus clearly found this kind of story to be unsatisfying: to be morally wrong and practically right is not possible in Phaedrus's moral vision of the fable's world. Thus, even though Phaedrus does not tamper with the plot of this traditional story (that is, he does not rescue the lamb from the wolf), he radically alters the framing and interpretation of the story, suppressing the endomythium and substituting an authorial condemnation of the wolf's unredeemed wickedness. The resulting poem then rings with moral indignation, but it does not have any clear didactic application: Phaedrus says that the fable is written *propter illos*, against those wicked wolfish people who oppress the tellers of truth, the innocent and honest little lambs. What then is the didactic function of writing about powerful people in this way? The powerful people are insulted, they are compared to wolves, they are called liars: but in the end, the lying wolf still gets to eat the lamb. Phaedrus's lamb does speak the truth, he is innocent: but he accomplishes nothing. For Phaedrus, on the other hand, the failure of the lamb is only a practical failure, not a moral one; unlike the traditional tellers of Aesopic tales, Phaedrus is more

interested in a story about truth and justice, or more precisely, in a story about truth that is tyrannized, and justice that goes terribly wrong.

### ***Phaedrus and the Sadness of the World***

It is this shift in narrative orientation, I would argue, which most strongly distances Phaedrus from the traditional Aesopic genre and which also explains Phaedrus's generally tendentious and often humorless moralizing. For Phaedrus, the Aesopic fable is not just about mistakes and fools and foolishness; instead, Phaedrus's fables seek to unmask the power that is wielded by the wicked, and to lament the unjust punishments that innocent persons might suffer.<sup>108</sup> Phaedrus's poems thus read more like satire than fables, and it is satire of a rather humorless sort. Because Phaedrus is so concerned with power itself, rather than with cleverness or intelligence, it is enough for a lion to be a lion in one of his fables, or for a wolf to be a wolf: there is not a distinction to be made between the wise or foolish lion, or the wise or foolish wolf, as we find in traditional Aesopic fables. Phaedrus's animals become more and more like the fixed emblems of specific qualities: the lamb is defenseless, the wolf is rapacious.<sup>109</sup> Phaedrus's fables are not designed to test the wit and wisdom of the creatures in their encounters with one

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<sup>108</sup> Here we can perhaps safely make use of Phaedrus's biography, because about this much at least Phaedrus is very explicit: he considered himself the victim of injustice. Although Phaedrus did not see fit to share with us the details of his life as a slave, or his perceptions of himself as a *libertus*, he does discuss his unfair persecution by Sejanus; see the useful analysis in LaPenna (1959).

<sup>109</sup> See Solinas (1992: xvi) for a listing of the especially emblematic animals which seem to have a fixed value in Phaedrus's fables.

another, but rather to dramatically illustrate an encounter whose outcome is already a foregone conclusion. In short, Phaedrus turns the Aesopic story of a mistake into the story of a crime. This allows Phaedrus to file a criminal complaint in the end, but it does not allow him to deduce a didactic moral in the traditional Aesopic sense of the word.

This complaining, pitiable quality permeates Phaedrus's fables, making their plots both pathetic and seemingly inevitable. While traditional Aesopic fables revel in surprise outcomes (such as the wolf who stupidly lets the kid escape, the tortoise who incongruously beats the rabbit in a race, and so on), Phaedrus is not so much interested in surprise outcomes as he is attracted to the unavoidable sorrow of life itself, the forlorn accumulation of injustice and suffering over time, as in the this plotless and pathetic fable that Phaedrus tells about a racehorse sent to the mills:<sup>110</sup>

Equum e quadriga multis palmis nobilem  
Abegit quidam et in pistrinum vendidit.  
Productus ad bibendum cum foret a molis,  
In circum aequales ire conspexit suos,  
Ut grata ludis redderent certamina.  
Lacrimis obortis "ite felices, ait,  
Celebrate sine me cursu sollemnem diem;  
Ego, quo scelesti furis attraxit manus,  
Ibi sorte tristi fata deflebo mea."

Someone took a horse who had run with the chariots and won many prizes and sold him to work turning a mill. One day when he was led out from the mill to drink, he saw some of his racing teammates going to the track to contribute their welcome races to the games. Tears welled up in his eyes, and he said, "Go with good fortune, celebrate this festive day as you race without me; meanwhile I will lament my destiny, allotted by cruel fortune [*sorte tristi fata deflebo mea*], here where the criminal hand of a thief has led me."

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<sup>110</sup> Phaedrus Appendix 21 = Perry 549.

Just as the little lamb was devoured in an unjust slaying, *iniusta nece*, this poor horse can do nothing but lament his deplorable fate: *sorte tristi fata deflebo mea*. In this case, Phaedrus tells a tale with no plot, where the point is only to simulate the endomythium of an Aesopic fable... but what is the didactic message of this moral exactly? The horse complains that life is unfair and filled with sadness: this is the most universal and inevitable injustice, but it has nothing to do with the world of Aesop. Within the framework of the traditional Aesopic fable, such a story does not even make sense. Phaedrus's race-horse has not made a mistaken choice or a mistaken judgment; indeed, this horse has not made any choice or judgment at all, and says instead that he was captured by a thief and sold into slavery. There is nothing humorous about this story and there is no didactic message; it is, in short, not an Aesopic fable. It follows the form of a fable, in that a talking animal pronounces an endomythium at the end of a brief narrative. Yet despite the fact that Phaedrus adopts the form of the fable, he omits the traditional story of a mistake and its punishment, substituting instead a new narrative of the injustice and suffering that afflicts us in this world.

The complete absence of verbal wit and humor in Phaedrus's poem becomes very clear in comparison to Babrius's version of what is essentially the same story. In this case, Babrius bases his epimythium not on the horse's pathetic condition in his old age, but on the foolish boasting of his youth:<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Babrius 29 = Perry 318. The tone of Babrius's fable, and the explicit dimension of foolish youth proved wrong by age, led Perry to assign these two fables about the horse in the mill to different type numbers: Babrius 29 is Perry 318, and Phaedrus Appendix 21 is Perry 549. But in what sense can Babrius and Phaedrus's poems be called "different" fables? Rodriguez-Adrados classifies both of them as H-128.

Gerôn poth' hippos eis alêton eprathê,  
zeukhtheis d' hupo mulên pasan hesperên êlei.  
kai dê stenaxas eipen "ek dromôn hoiôn  
kamptêras hoious alphiteusi gureuô."  
Mê lian epairou pros to tês akmês gauron.  
pollois to gêras en kopois anêlôthê.

A race-horse who had grown old was sold to grind grain. He was yoked to the mill and ground the mill all evening long. Then sighing heavily [*stenaxas*] he said: "Having once turned goalposts in the races, now I must turn the goalposts of millers." Do not boast too much in the strength of youth. For many men, old age is spent toiling away.

As we have seen before, Babrius shows a much more restrained response to the traditional Aesopic fable. Even though Babrius appends a somewhat sad and sentimental epimythium to the fable, he lets the endomythium -- with all its verbal wit -- remain intact. The poor horse may be groaning (*stenaxas*), but the words he pronounces are humorous ones, with a tangled word play on running a racecourse versus the course he must trace out in the mill. Babrius may feel sorry for the horse, but it does not stop him from making the horse the negative focus of the story's epimythium: don't be like the horse, he said, who expected to have a carefree old age and instead faced even worse toils than before. The horse, meanwhile, in pronouncing a witty endomythium about his own condition, manifests a defiant sense of humor: this sort of wittiness in the face of disaster is the only kind of protest that is possible in the traditional Aesopic fable. Phaedrus's horse, on the other hand, does not recognize anything potentially humorous about his plight. Rather than using the resources of verbal wit to describe his condition, this horse complains that he is the victim of wrong-doing ("led here by the accursed grasping of a thief," as he says). Burdened by this sense of injustice, Phaedrus's horse cannot make jokes but only weep: *sorte tristi fata deflebo mea*, I will lament my fate,

with its miserable fortune. In place of the usual Aesopic laughter -- witty, derisive, pitiless, and pointed -- Phaedrus has substituted a pitiable and pointless weeping.

### *Phaedrus and the Victims of the Fables*

By imposing a new master narrative of justice and injustice on the traditional narrative of the fables, Phaedrus produces some unexpected and creative misreadings of the old stories, proposing new interpretations that are seemingly at odds with the story itself. This contradictory tension between the author's moralization of the story and its manifest plot is most clear in Phaedrus's version of the Aesopic fable of the crow who tricks the eagle out of a delectable dinner of turtle meat. Although the plot of the story is clearly about the struggle between the eagle and the crow as to who is going to eat a turtle, Phaedrus's moralizing promythium to the story turns our attention to the turtle itself:<sup>112</sup>

Contra potentes nemo est munitus satis;  
Si vero accessit consiliator maleficus,  
Vis et nequitia quicquid oppugnant ruit:  
Aquila in sublime sustulit testudinem.  
Quae cum abdidisset cornea corpus domo  
Nec ullo pacto laedi posset condita,  
Venit per auras cornix et propter volans:  
Opimam sane praedam rapuisti unguibus;  
Sed nisi monstraro quid sit faciendum tibi,  
Gravi nequiquam te lassabit pondere.  
Promissa parte suadet ut scopulum super

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<sup>112</sup> Phaedrus 2.6 = Perry 490. Phaedrus is the only ancient source for this fable, but it is found in Berechiah 20, Marie de France 12, and in various versions of the prose Romulus. For a discussion of the many versions of the story, and the difficulties in analyzing the relationships among these different versions, see the excellent discussion in Schwarzbaum's commentary on Berechiah 20 (1979).

Altis ab astris duram inlidat corticem.  
Qua comminuta facile vescatur cibo.  
Inducta vaftris aquila monitis paruit,  
Simul et magistrae large divisit dapem.  
Sic tuta quae naturae fuerat munere,  
Impar duabus occidit tristi nece.

No one is sufficiently well-armed against the powerful [*contra potentes*]; but if an ill-scheming advisor joins in, then whatever is assailed by force and criminality [*vis et nequitia*] will come to ruin. An eagle carried a turtle up high, because she had hidden her flesh inside her home of horn, and could not be harmed by any means when tucked away. Through the air, a crow came flying along and met up with the eagle, who said: Indeed, you have snatched in your talons an excellent prize, but unless I show you what to do with it, it will exhaust you with its weight to no purpose. When the eagle promised the crow a share, the crow advised her to drop the hard shell from the starry heights so that it would strike a rock, and once it was broken the food could be easily eaten. Attracted by the clever counsel [*vaftris monitis*] of the crow, the eagle obeyed, and at the same time generously divided the feast with her teacher. Thus, the one who had been protected by a gift of nature was no match for the two of them and died a sad death [*impar duabus occidit tristi nece*].

In Phaedrus's moralizing promythium, we are told that this will be a story of *vis et nequitia* showing how the *potentes* are able to bring disaster upon a seemingly secure person, who turns out to defenseless after all. Phaedrus's anticipatory promythium thus asks us to consider the turtle to be the focal point of the story, a harmless creature who seems to be defended by his shell but who is literally undone by the alliance of the *potentes*, the crow and the eagle. This pathetic interpretation is carried through in the closing lines of the poem which, even though they are not technically an epimythium, are permeated with Phaedrus's own vocabulary of injustice (*impar*) and pitiable death (*tristi nece*). Once again, Phaedrus has suppressed the endomythium: there is no character who has the last word. Instead, Phaedrus has filled the closing lines of the poem with his highly colored narrative of pathetic outrage rather than a traditional endomythium.

Yet if we consider the poem without Phaedrus's promythium and without these closing words, the underlying Aesopic fable begins to emerge: within the traditional Aesopic framework, this was a story about a foolish eagle tricked by a crow, with no attention paid to the turtle at all. The endomythium can be pronounced by the crow ("Oh what a fool the eagle was to take my advice, because thereby I was able to take his supper!") or by the eagle ("Oh what a fool I was to take the crow's advice when all he wanted to do was take my supper!") -- but there is no endomythium for the turtle to pronounce in the Aesopic tradition, simply because the turtle is not really even a character in the story. It is only Phaedrus, the author outside of the story, who forces our attention on that turtle, and makes us empathize with his grim demise. Phaedrus has seized upon an utterly unimportant character in the story, the turtle, and made him the focal point of the reader's attention. Yet in other versions of this story, the turtle is so unimportant that he can be replaced by an inanimate edible object, such as a nut in a nutshell.<sup>113</sup> This casual substitution reveals the turtle for what he really is: not a character in his own regard, but only a prop in the story of the eagle and the crow.

It is possible to see this more traditional Aesopic version of the fable emerge over the course of the Middle Ages, as the "Romulus" tradition gradually moves away from Phaedrus's version of the text and towards a more coherent version, in which the moral of the story is made to accord with the plot's focus on the eagle and the crow, rather than

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<sup>113</sup> Marie de France 12 (= Perry 490) tells the story about a mollusk, and Berechiah substitutes a snail for the turtle (20 = Perry 490). In Berechiah the eagle laments his stupidity in the manner we would expect (translation by Hadas): "The eagle grieved sore for having heeded the raven's counsel, for his own prey he had made ready for the raven; his cunning had made him release his booty; and he had cast food away from his teeth."



on the turtle. The storyteller of the "Romulus Anglicus," for example, clearly recognized that the eagle and the crow were the antagonistic feature players of the story, with the turtle being just a prop in their typically Aesopic dispute:<sup>114</sup>

Aquila secus mare deambulavit piscacionis studio; sed, nullo pisce invento, in concham offendit, que testudinem intus habuit. Hanc ergo unguibus arripiens, ad littus devexit, ut ibi prandia faceret et testudinem suis usibus utilem redderet. Dum ergo ad hoc intendit ut illam consumere possit, concha quam induerat ab unguibus et rostro eam defendit. Sic itaque aquila conatus suos diu in vanum consumpsit, quia nulla vi vel arte testudinem habere potuit. Cornix ergo qui aderat forte, videns aquilam in irritum laborare et iam velle desistere, accessit propius, et ait: Regius ille cibus nequaquam erit abiiciendus. Cui dixit aquila: Testa inexpugnabilis, ut vides, murus est limaci, et frustra labores meos expendo. Et ait cornix: Si mecum dividere velis, sumendi tibi formam monstrabo. Dic ergo, ait aquila, ut hec prandia te comitem habeant. Et ait ei cornix ingeniosa: Igitur tibi sublime volandum erit, et littus petrosum subtus habebis, testaque de superis auris, ab unguibus dimissa, in littore petroso allidetur, et confracta testudine servare non poterit, sed sine sponte sua tue voluntati eam patebit. Aquila ergo cornicis approbat consilium, et in sublimi, ut docuit, volitans, testudinem ab unguibus suis dimisit, quam cornix subtus exspectans protinus rapuit, et aquilam esurientem fraudavit. Moralitas. Sic astuti simplices infatuant, et dolis peragunt quod viribus nequeunt.

The eagle was making her way along the ocean one day, intending to go fishing. But while she didn't find any fish, she did come across a shell, and inside the shell was a turtle. She snatched this up in her claws, and went to the shore, where she planned to have a feast, and turn the turtle to good use by her own efforts. But while this was indeed her plan, to eat up the turtle, the shell which the turtle was wearing protected the turtle from her claws and beak. And so it was that the eagle wasted her efforts for a long time, because by no force of strength or art could she get at the turtle. So it was that the crow happened along and saw the eagle laboring in vain and about to give up, so the crow approached the eagle and said: That is food fit for a king and by no means should it be tossed away. The eagle answered her: But the vessel in which it is contained is unbreakable, as you see, the wall is smooth, and I am wasting my efforts for nothing. And the crow said: If you will agree to divide it with me, I will show you the way that it can be obtained. Well then, tell me, said the eagle, so that you and I can enjoy this feast together. And the tricky crow [*cornix ingeniosa*] said to the eagle: What you must do is to fly up high, and when you will find

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<sup>114</sup> Romuli Anglici Cunctis Exortae Fabulae 13 (Hervieux, II.574) = Perry 490.

yourself high above some rocky shore, you should let the vessel drop from your claws from high up in the air, and it will strike against the rocky shore, and against its will it will lie open to your wishes. The eagle thus followed the crow's advice, and just as the crow had ordered, she flew up into the air and let the turtle down from her claws. Below, the crow was waiting for the turtle to fall and she immediately snatched it up, and she deceived the hungry eagle [*aquilam esurientem fraudavit*]. The moral: So it is that tricksters are able to baffle more simple folk [*sic astuti simplices infatuant*], and by means of tricks they are able to accomplish what brute force cannot do.

In this delightful version of the story, our medieval storyteller has grasped the traditional Aesopic thread of the tale in order to spin out a more elaborate version, based on the dialogue that takes place between the crow and the eagle. In this form, the moral of the story is much more closely connected with the plot. Even though there is an authorial epimythium rather than an endomythium pronounced by the crow or by the eagle, the epimythium responds directly to the structure of the mistake and its punishment: the eagle is a simpleton, a *simplex*, who was fooled by the crow's helpful pretense, and as a result she must go without her supper, even though she is hungry (*esurientem*). In this form, the story is close to the Aesopic fable discussed at length in Chapter 1, in which the fox tricks the goat into helping her get out of the well.<sup>115</sup> The tricky fox, like the tricky crow, pretends to be engaged in a joint endeavor with her foolish counterpart, but in the end the goat and the eagle are both punished for their trusting credulity: the goat is abandoned at the bottom of the well, and the eagle surrenders her supper. Phaedrus, however, has changed the moral of the eagle's story in order to focus on the turtle's fate, although he did not alter the plot or the dialogue inside the story in order to reinforce this new interpretation of the story.

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<sup>115</sup> Perry 9, cited on p. 9.

By using the "moral" to focus on the turtle's downfall, Phaedrus shows how the aggressive use of authorial commentary can radically transform the traditional fable. The new master narrative of "injustice" is able to provoke a new interpretation, even if the plot itself remains basically unchanged. Instead of the traditional Aesopic narrative in which a fool is punished for his mistake, Phaedrus has a different narrative pattern in mind: the story of an innocent creature who is punished unjustly at the hands of the rich and the powerful. Thus, in this fable about the crow and the eagle, Phaedrus's ultimate concern is not with the eagle's ignorance but instead with the tragic fate met by the poor turtle.<sup>116</sup> Phaedrus's intervention in the traditional fable's interpretation is therefore a fitting prelude to the re-appropriation of the Aesopic fable tradition by Christian preachers of the Middle Ages. In many ways, Phaedrus's insistence on the theme of justice and injustice in the fables anticipates the medieval preachers who will turn to Aesopic fables as ready material, but changing the interpretation of traditional tales and characters in order to exert their interpretive authority over the text, and at the same time to exert authority over their audience. In the same way that Phaedrus expanded his *epimythia*, and imposed a sense of moral order on the Aesopic universe, the medieval preachers will craft pious sermons around these stories, using allegorical interpretations to detect unexpected Christian patterns of meaning within these familiar tales.

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<sup>116</sup> Perry suggests something similar about the Greek prose fables (1940: 405): "it was natural to extend the practice [of adding *epimythia*] to other fables where the moral, though implied in the epigrammatic or dramatic ending, was not stated explicitly enough or generically enough to satisfy the writer's ethical obsession." It is perhaps extreme to speak of an "ethical obsession" in the Greek prose writers, but in the case of Phaedrus and the Christian writers of the Middle Ages, "ethical obsession" is precisely appropriate.

## CHAPTER 4

### Odo of Cheriton and Christian Simplicity

#### Part One. Odo's Christian Fables.

When the Christian preachers of the Middle Ages confronted the tradition of the Aesopic fable, they found themselves facing a serious problem. On the one hand, Jesus himself taught in parables,<sup>1</sup> and there is much figurative language in the Bible that recalls both the form and function of the Aesopic fable tradition. Yet, at the same time, the parables of Jesus are quite different from the fables of Aesop. These New Testament parables do not revolve around the formulaic "story of a mistake" as in the fables; even more importantly, the parables are not meant to be funny.<sup>2</sup> In Aesopic fables, on the other hand, a vicious sense of humor is central to the genre's didactic mechanism. It is the "derision" suffered by the mistaken character in the story that makes the Aesopic fable into an effective exemplum. This didactic model is obviously far removed from the teaching style adopted by Jesus in the New Testament, and this lack of fit between Biblical parables and Aesopic fables posed a major challenge for the medieval preachers who wanted to make use of the Aesopic fable as a means of instruction.

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<sup>1</sup> On the problematic vocabulary of fable and parable, see van Dijk (1997).

<sup>2</sup> On the allegorical tradition of interpreting the fables, Wailes (1987) is essential. On the original cultural context of Jesus's preaching, see Stern (1991). On suspicions about humor, consider this remark in the allegorical interpretation that Odo provides for the story of the wolf and the rabbit (Odo 58 = Perry 616): *Si appropinquas pulchre mulieri, quasi lupus te devorabit; in solo tactu, visu, vel risu intrat Diabolus.*

### ***Odo and the Animals***

Thus, while Aesopic fables flourished outside the Church in the Middle Ages (in collections based largely on prose paraphrases of Phaedrus or imitations of Avianus), it was not an easy matter for preachers to take on the body of Aesopic fables and bring it into the Christian didactic repertoire. Yet at some point in the early thirteenth century, Magister Odo, a Norman Englishman, and perhaps a member of the Cistercian order,<sup>3</sup> compiled a set of fables specifically intended for use by preachers. Of the nearly one hundred Aesopic fables in Odo's book, only one out of five is also extant in the ancient Greco-Roman Aesopic collections.<sup>4</sup> In addition to these Aesopic fables, Odo also includes approximately twenty chapters "natural history" allegories in which Odo provides brief descriptions of animals such as the phoenix, crocodile, panther, together with Christian interpretations of these animals' "natural" traits. This allegorical approach to the animals had been defined by the Physiologus in late antiquity, and over the course of the Middle Ages the fifty or so animals originally analyzed in the Physiologus had grown into a huge collection of "bestiary" lore encompassing the entire animal kingdom.

Odo's inclusion of these bestiary tales in his collection of Aesopic fables is an

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<sup>3</sup> Jacobs concludes there is no reason to think that Odo necessarily belonged to any monastic order (1985: 15).

<sup>4</sup> It is difficult to identify with complete certainty how many fables should be assigned to the collection; Hervieux separates his fables numbered 76-81 from the main collection (IV.250-255), but does not group these five fables with the three collections of *Odonis de Ceritona fabulis addita* (IV.361-416). Ben Perry included 42 of Odo's fables in his enumeration of the ancient *Aesopica*, but given his refusal to provide a precise definition of the fable, it is not clear why he included only these fables of Odo, and not all of them, in his collection.

important part of his project to provide a suitably Christian appropriation of the Aesopic fables themselves. Far more even than Phaedrus, Odo changes the interpretive framework for the fables: rather than supplying the fables with epimythia, Odo attaches lengthy explanations to each fable, based on the model of interpretation defined in the Physiologus and bestiary tradition. The length of this explanation is usually about equal to the story itself, and follows allegorical procedures of interpretation that are reminiscent of Biblical exegesis.<sup>5</sup> Odo's version of the pelican provides a typical example of the genre:<sup>6</sup>

De pellicano. et applicatur passioni Christi. Pellicanus, quando pulli sui erigunt rostrum et picant contra ipsum, interficit eos. Postea, cum videt pullos suos mortuos, pietate motus, extrahit sanguinem de latere et super filios suos respergit, et reviviscunt. Sic Adam et Eva contra Dominum picaverunt, quando, transgrediendo preceptum ipsius, pomum vetitum comederunt. Et ipse iratus picavit contra ipsos et interfecit, quia mortui sunt in anima, mortales in corpore. Dominus misericordia motus permisit sanguinem et aquam extrahi de latere suo, respersit super pullos suos, scilicet humanum genus, et sic revixerunt. Aquam respergit, cum baptizantur, sanguinem, quando, in fide sanguinis, in fide passionis Christi salvantur, et quando sanguis ipsius in sacramento sumitur. Versus: Ut pellicanus fit Patris sanguine sanus, / Sic genus humanum fit Christi sanguine sanum. Unde vox Christi: Similis factus sum Pellicano solitudinis.

Concerning the pelican, and its comparison to the passion of Christ. The pelican kills his chicks when they lift up their beaks against the pelican. Then, when he

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<sup>5</sup> Compare also the allegorical explication of Jesus's parables as discussed at length in Wailes (1987).

<sup>6</sup> Odo 57. The pelican is found in both the Greek and Latin Physiologus traditions, and Odo was clearly fond of this exemplum, as it shows up also in his sermons (Parabolae 10 in Hervieux, vol. IV) in a much abbreviated form: *Pellicanus proprios filios occidit, quia rostra sua contra ipsum erigit et percuciantur; sed videns ipsos mortuos sanguinem de latere extrahit, perfundit ipsos et vivificat. Sic Eva et Adam, quia rostrum suum per inobedientiam contra Deum erexerunt, interfecti sunt. Sed Dominus misertus de proprio latere sanguinem ad potandum dedit, et sic ad vitam revocavit. Unde quidam: Ut pellicanus sit matris sanguine sanus, etc.*

sees his dead chicks he is moved by piety, and lets blood pour forth from his side, sprinkling it upon his chicks, and they return to life. Thus Adam and Eve pecked at the Lord, when, violating his command, they ate the forbidden fruit. And thus he grew angry and pecked at them and killed them, because they are dead in soul, and mortal in body [*quia mortui sunt in anima, mortales in corpore*]. Then the Lord, moved by mercy, allowed blood and water to pour from his side, sprinkling it on his chicks, that is, on the human race, and thus they came back to life. He sprinkles water when they are baptized, and blood when they achieve salvation by faith in the blood, by faith in the passion of Christ, when his blood is taken in the sacrament. So the verse reads: As the pelican is healed by the blood of Father, / so the human race is healed by the blood of Christ. Therefore Christ speaks thus: I have become like a pelican in the desert.

This little story about the pelican has little in common with the traditional Aesopic fable. First, the events described here are not a one-time occurrence, but a natural fact in the life history of the pelican (although it is a mysterious and marvelous sort of fact, reminiscent of the ancient *mirabilia* tradition). This is meant, on some level, to be a "real" pelican, unlike the fictitious animals in the world of Aesop. Then, in the interpretation of the pelican's story, Odo does not provide a moral whose truth has been demonstrated by the story, but instead he provides another story, a reflection of the first story in Christian terms. This is an entirely different mode of interpretation, which can justifiably be called "allegorical" in that there is a one-to-one equation between a series of details in the animal story and a corresponding series of Christian motifs:<sup>7</sup> the chicks are Adam and Eve, while the pelican is God; poking the father-bird is equivalent to eating the forbidden fruit; the father-bird killing the children is an image of the Fall in which Adam and his descendants were made mortal; the blood and the water drawn from the father-bird's side is the water of baptism and the blood of communion as dramatized

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<sup>7</sup> For definitions of allegory, see the useful appendix in Whitman (1987).

in the passion of Christ. Odo then cites proof-texts for his argument:<sup>8</sup> a bit of verse by an unknown author and a cryptic line from Psalm 101 in which David, compares himself to a pelican in the desert (the same Biblical passage which is found at the head of the Physiologus chapter about the pelican<sup>9</sup>). Although this story about the pelican is not like any Aesopic fable that we have seen before, it does help Odo in his project to appropriate the Aesopic fables for use by Christian preachers. The Physiologus tradition does not share the form or function of the Aesopic fables, but Odo relies on the Physiologus tradition to provide a Christian model for telling and interpreting stories about animals. The traditional explication of the fable's moral thus gives way to an allegorical mode, something unprecedented in the Greco-Roman Aesopic tradition.

### *The Fox and the Crow in Aesopic Allegory*

For an example of Odo's allegorical interpretive procedures applied to a traditional Aesopic fable, we can turn to this version of the fox, the crow and the cheese:<sup>10</sup>

De caseo et corvo. contra vanam gloriam.<sup>11</sup> Sicut narrat Ysopus, "Caseus in rostro corvi pendebat ab alto..." et vulpes, cupiens caseum comedere, dixit corvo: Quam bene cantabat pater tuus! Vellem audire vocem tuam. Corvus aperuit os

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<sup>8</sup> This use of proof texts is completely alien to the interpretive procedures of the Aesopic fable and instead belongs to the tradition of Biblical exegesis (for a discussion of early Biblical exegesis, see the very useful comments of Kugel, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> As, for example, in the Latin Physiologus, Carmody Y-6: *David in psalmo centesimo primo dicit: Similis factus sum pellicano in solitudine.*

<sup>10</sup> Odo 70 = Perry 124.

<sup>11</sup> Odo's fables frequently have this type of promythium, in which a general moral application is indicated, rather than the allegorical type of interpretation which is often expounded in the epimythium.



suum et cantavit, et sic caseus cecidit, et vulpes eum comedit. Sic plerique portant caseum, hoc est nutrimentum, unde anima debet vivere, scilicet pacienciam, graciā, caritatem. Sed venit Diabolus et excitat illos ad opus vane glorie, ut cantent, se ipsos commendent, fimbrias suas magnificent; et sic, quia gloriā mundi, non gloriā, que Dei est, querunt, pacienciam et omnes virtutes amittunt. Sic David, quia populum suum ad vanam gloriā numeravit, in magna parte amisit.

Concerning the cheese and the crow; against vainglory [*contra vanam gloriā*]. As Aesop tells, "A cheese was hanging from the beak of a crow in a tree.." and the fox, wanting to eat the cheese, said to the crow: How beautifully your father used to sing! I would like to hear what your voice sounds like. The crow opened his mouth and began to sing, and thus the cheese fell out, and the fox ate it up. And so there are many who carry a cheese, that is food, which is required for the life of the soul, which is to say, patience, grace, and charity. But the Devil comes and tempts them to an act of vainglory [*opus vane glorie*], so that they sing and praise themselves and glorify the brocade of their garments [*fimbrias suas*]; and thus they seek the glory of this world [*gloriā mundi*] not the glory which belongs to God [*non gloriā, que Dei est*]. They lose all their patience and all their virtues [*omnes virtutes amittunt*]. Likewise David lost [*amisit*] a great many of his people because he sought to number his people in an act of vainglory [*ad vanam gloriā*].

Odo's telling of the story is clear and to the point, and even rather elegant. Like Phaedrus, however, Odo has a tendency to suppress the endomythium of his stories. Even more importantly, Odo interprets the stories in terms of sin and sinners rather than the traditional Aesopic rhetoric of fools and their mistakes. So, for example, while Phaedrus characterized the crow as a fool, *ille stultus*,<sup>12</sup> Odo takes a different, more complicated approach. Odo interprets the story item-by-item, beginning not even with the crow or the fox, but with the cheese. In other words, Odo does not begin with the "M" function of the plot (the crow's foolishness), or the "R" function of the plot (the fox's exploitation of the crow's vanity), but rather with a mere prop in the staging of the

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<sup>12</sup> Phaedrus 1.13 = Perry 124, cited on p. 16

plot: the piece of cheese. For Odo, the piece of cheese is not just food, but a symbol of spiritual nourishment, which is to say, patience, grace, and charity:

Sic plerique portant caseum, hoc est nutrimentum, unde anima debet vivere, scilicet pacienciam, gratiam, caritatem.

And so there are many who carry a cheese, that is food, which is required for the life of the soul, which is to say, patience, grace, and charity.

This opposition between the "physical" story and its "spiritual" meaning, between the earthly cheese and the celestial cheese, is the fundamental operating principle in Odo's allegorical approach to the fables, even though it is quite alien to the Aesopic tradition. Not only does this opposition between the body and the soul, the letter and the spirit, authorize Odo to interpret the fables in strictly Christian terms, it also implies a set of value judgments: for Odo, the crow's cheese cannot be a valuable thing insofar as it is physical food, something that is merely eaten. Instead, it must be spiritual food, a symbol of the virtues which sustain the soul.<sup>13</sup> Aesop would find that laughable: food is highly prized in the world of Aesop, and there is no need to make a spiritual apology on its behalf.

Odo's treatment of the fox in this story is also atypical in the Aesopic tradition.

For Aesop, the fox is only a means to move the plot forward, a way to test and punish

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<sup>13</sup> The opposition of body/spirit and similarly earth/heaven is found throughout Odo's fables. In Odo 29 (= Perry 599), the crow blinds the foolish eagle: *et ita oculi spirituales sunt extincti*. In Odo 36a (no Perry number), it is the sinner who is drawn to the earth: *sed tu semper trahis in terram, quia semper peccas*. The monkey in Odo 47 (no Perry number) does not know how to extract the nutmeat from the nutshell: *Sic est de stolidis hominibus, quia sub amaritudine pene presentis latet gaudium vite celestis*. The ants in Odo 75 (= Perry 521) who store grain for the winter are laboring for a celestial reward: *Dominus concedit quod talia grana ad celestem patriam mittamus*.

the crow and to verbally rebuke the foolish bird. In short, the fox simply embodies the "R" function of the plot. The fox is not to be praised or blamed in the Aesopic framework; instead, it is the crow's behavior that is subject to judgment (and punishment). For Odo, on the other hand, the moral weight of the story shifts profoundly, because the fox is now the Enemy, the Devil, whose function in the plot is not to correct mistakes but to corrupt good Christians in a cosmic struggle between good and evil:<sup>14</sup>

Venit Diabolus et excitat illos ad opus vane glorie, ut cantent, se ipsos commendent, fimbrias suas magnificent; et sic, quia gloriam mundi, non gloriam, que Dei est, querunt, pacienciam et omnes virtutes amittunt.

But the Devil comes and tempts them to an act of vainglory [*opus vane glorie*], so that they sing and praise themselves and glorify the brocade of their garments [*fimbrias suas*]; and thus they seek the glory of this world [*gloriam mundi*] not the glory which belongs to God [*non gloriam, que Dei est*]. They lose all their patience and all their virtues [*omnes virtutes amittunt*].

The Devil is lurking everywhere in Odo's fables.<sup>15</sup> The deceitful fox who tricks the

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<sup>14</sup> The allegorical methods of the Physiologus also discover the devil lurking in the animal world. This entry from the "Y" version of the Latin Physiologus, in which the whale is equated with the devil, provides a typical example (Carmody Y-30): *Physiologus autem dixit de cetio quoddam, quod est in mari, nomine aspidocoleon vocatur, magnum nimis, simile insule, et plus quam harena gravis, figuram habens Diabuli. Ignorantes autem naute, alligant ad eum naves sicut ad insulam, et anchoras et palos navis configunt in eo; et accendunt super eum ignem ad coquendum sibi aliquid; si autem excaluerit cetus, urinat, descendens in profundum, et demergit omnes naves. Sic et tu, o homo, si suspendas te et aligas teipsum in spe Diabuli, demergit te secum simul in gehennam ignis.*

<sup>15</sup> In some cases, the Devil is actually a metonymy for sin itself, as in Odo 11 (= Perry 590), where the stork's beak is the Devil: *tamen semper rostrum suum, maliciam suam, materiam peccandi, Diabolum inclusum secum portant.* In Odo 18 (no Perry number), the devil is not the enemy of mankind but of Jesus Christ, the "hydrus" who descends into the mouth of the diabolical crocodile: *ut facilius laberetur in os Diaboli, et sic intravit et cor Diaboli mordens ipsum interfecit.*

wolf into descending into the well is a symbol of the Devil:<sup>16</sup> *vulpeculis significat Diabolum*, "the fox is a symbol of the Devil."<sup>17</sup> The fox playing dead to capture innocent birds is another dangerous Devil, even though he looks harmless: *sic Diabolus fingit se mortuum*, "so too the Devil pretends to be dead."<sup>18</sup> There are other animals who are marked as diabolic predators by reason of their sheer physical force, their sharp teeth and grasping claws.<sup>19</sup> So, for example, the city mouse and the country mouse are

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<sup>16</sup> Because they are deceivers, the buzzard and the eagle can also be symbols of the Devil. In Odo 4 (= Perry 644), the tricky buzzard is the devil: *sed busardus, id est Diabolus, habet suos pullos inter alios*. In Odo 5 (= Perry 230), the eagle tricks the turtle into trying to fly: *rogat aquilam, id est Diabolum, quod aliquo modo ipsum exaltet*. The sly "break-bone" bird in Odo 9 (no Perry number) is also the Devil: *ita facit Diabolus: quando non potest virum constantem confringere, elevat ipsum in altitudinem dignitatis et tunc permittit cadere, quod totus confringitur*.

<sup>17</sup> Odo 19 = Perry 593.

<sup>18</sup> Odo 49 (no Perry number). This same account of the fox is found also in the Physiologus, as in this chapter from the "Y" Latin version (Carmody Y-18): *Vulpis dolosum animal est omnimodo, et dolos parat. Si esurierit et non invenerit quod manducet, requirit ubi est scyssura terre et palearum, et proicit se supina, sursum respiciens, et adducit flatos suos infra se: expanditur omnino. Et putant volatilia quoniam mortua est; descendunt super eam ut manducent eam, et rapit ea, et extenderat, et mala morte volatilia ipsa moriuntur. Et Diabolus omnino mortuus est, et actus operi eius: qui vult communicare carniem eius, morietur; etenim carnes eius sunt fornicationes, cupiditates, voluptates, adversantes seculi*.

<sup>19</sup> Or talons. Predatory birds often serve as symbols of the Devil. In Odo 21b (= Perry 384), the kite who snatches up both the mouse and the frog (who are tied to one another) is the Devil: *venit Diabolus et asportat utrumque capellandum et parochiam*. In Odo 29 (= Perry 599) the crow who snatches the chicks of the eagle is the Devil: *et sic Diabolus pullos eorum rapit et devorat*. Odo 34 (= Perry 601) tells the story of a foolish chick devoured by a kite who is, of course, the Devil: *et venit milvus, id est Diabolus, et rapit talem pullum stultum*.

terrified by a diabolical cat:<sup>20</sup> *super morsellum iniuste adquisitum sedet Diabolus, sedet catus qui animas devorat*, "the Devil sits atop the mouthful that is wrongfully acquired, there sits the cat who devours your soul." Even an inanimate mousetrap can serve as a diabolical predator: *predam quam cupis in muscipula est; capis alienum et caperis a Diabolo*, "the prize you desire is in the mousetrap; taking what belongs to someone else, you will be trapped by the Devil."<sup>21</sup> It is not only predators, however, who are symbols of the Devil: animals that are ugly or unclean can also be interpreted as diabolical.<sup>22</sup> This is true, for example, of the toad, as in the story of the father toad who foolishly thinks his son the toad is more beautiful than any other creature: *quicumque enim fornicacionem, adulterium, furtum perpetrat, pulcrum sponsum relinquit et bufonem diligit; Diabolum amplectitur, bufoni adheret*, "for whosoever commits fornication, adultery or theft abandons the beautiful bridegroom and loves a toad; he embraces the Devil, he clings to the toad."

In addition to identifying the fox as a diabolical agent in the story of "the fox, the crow, and the cheese," Odo also provides an interpretation of the song provoked by the Devil: the crow's cawing is an *opus vanae gloriae*, a work of vainglory, which is to say

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<sup>20</sup> Odo 16 = Perry 352. There is another diabolical cat in Odo 79 (no Perry number): *venit ergo murilegus, id est Diabolus, temptans eos, et omnes devoret et in gehennam proicit*.

<sup>21</sup> Odo 49a (no Perry number).

<sup>22</sup> Unclean insects fall into this category, such as the spider and her web in Odo 28 (= Perry 598): *qui se inmittunt, a Diabolo devorantur*. In Odo 75 the flies caught in the spiderweb are the flies of the Devil (= Perry 521): *iste sunt musce Diaboli, quas aranee infernales devorabunt*.

the *gloria mundi*, glory of this world. This physical glory (which Odo links in the interpretation to *fimbriae*, the brocade of worldly gowns) is opposed to the *gloria Dei*, the glory of the heavenly world, another reflection of the opposition between terrestrial and celestial realities. The final outcome of this word-by-word glossing provides a spiritual exemplum from which we should take our lesson: just as the crow "lost his cheese" so we must be on guard against "losing our virtues." The cheese is thus a good thing (i.e., a spiritual thing, equivalent to *omnes virtutes*), but the singing is a bad thing (i.e., an earthly thing, equivalent to *opus vanae gloriae mundi*). As we would expect from the Aesopic plot, the story of the crow is a negative exemplum (don't be like that crow!), but the specific interpretation of that story is unlike anything we have seen so far in the Aesopic literature.

Moreover, in addition to this glossing of concrete items with abstract terms, Odo frequently introduces proof-texts for his arguments, either a piece of poetry or a Biblical citation. This too is unprecedented in the Aesopic tradition, which never depended on authoritative intertexts for its moral interpretations. Accordingly, in his analysis of the story of the fox and the crow, Odo ingeniously compares the story of the vain crow with his cheese to the story of David and the census of his people, as told in the Second Book of Samuel.<sup>23</sup> In a vain desire to discover the extent of his dominion, David sends Joab out to count the people, and he returns after nine months with the completed census

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<sup>23</sup> II Samuel 24.1-15.

figures.<sup>24</sup> Too late, David realizes that what he has done is wrong, and God offers him a choice of three punishments: three years of famine, three months of war or three days of plague. David chooses three days of plague and seventy thousand of his people die. This is clearly the incident to which Odo alludes when he says:

Sic David, quia populum suum ad vanam gloriam numeravit, in magna parte amisit.

Likewise David lost [*amisit*] a great many of his people because he sought to number his people in an act of vainglory [*ad vanam gloriam*].

Even though the story of David's census and the story of "the fox, the crow, and the cheese" are far removed from one another, for Odo the connection is perfectly clear. On the one hand, there is a connection in plot supplied by the word "to lose," *amittere*: the crow lost his cheese and David lost his people. In addition, there is also an interpretive link between the two stories. Even though David's story is about a census and the Aesopic fable is about cheese, they are both in fact about *vana gloria*, the vainglory of this world.

Odo's interpretive procedures -- his use of allegory and his use of Biblical proof-texts -- are unprecedented in the pagan history of the Aesopic fable. Yet while Odo provides elaborate Christian interpretations of the fables and sometimes alters the fables to suit his interpretations, he usually tells a pretty good story, and the stories that he tells

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<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, there is a theological gap between the language of II Samuel and Odo's vision of the world: in II Samuel it is not the Devil who tempts David, but instead an angry God who himself drives David to this insanity (*commovit David*, as the Vulgate explains). But for Odo, the dominant narrative danger always revolves around the Devil: it was the Devil who tempted the crow to sing and lose his cheese just as, by implication, it must have been the Devil who must have tempted David to make a census and lose his people.

are regularly based on "the story of a mistake," the typical Aesopic plot structure. Odo is admittedly reluctant to put the blame on the "M" character for his mistake, and he finds it morally awkward to have the Devil himself serving as the "R" character, yet these interpretive dilemmas do not prevent Odo from reveling in the stories that he tells. Moreover, while Phaedrus increasingly filled his books of fables with all kinds of non-Aesopic materials (jokes, anecdotes about the "rich and famous," etc.),<sup>25</sup> Odo sticks quite strictly to the Aesopic genre, supplemented with just a few bestiary items that help to anchor the Aesopic stories about animals in a larger Christian tradition of animal emblems. Odo's marked interest in Aesopic fables becomes even more clear if we compare Odo's collected fables to the many other collections of exempla compiled by and for preachers in the Middle Ages.<sup>26</sup> These other collections of exempla also contain a few scattered Aesopic fables, but a far larger number of the stories are based on the lives of the saints or exemplary stories about monks and nuns, sinners of various sorts, and other accounts of human -- not animal -- society. Odo, on the other hand, organizes his collection strictly around the animal stories and in the few cases where he does tell stories about people, he pairs those stories with parallel Aesopic fables about the animals.

The way that Odo combines stories in this way shows an almost analytical

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<sup>25</sup> For a discussion of "extra-Aesopic" materials in Phaedrus, see Chapter 3, p. ?.

<sup>26</sup> Even more interesting is the fact that Odo apparently did not rely on a literary compilation of Aesopic materials, as only a handful of his stories can be assigned to the pre-existing literary tradition of Aesopic fables (in contrast to his contemporary, Marie de France, whose collected fables contain a much larger number of items attested in the prior literary tradition of the fables). This would seem to suggest that Odo was working at least in part with a living, oral Aesopic tradition.



understanding of the plot, which is again unprecedented in the Aesopic tradition. Although some of the medieval collections rearrange a few of the fables in pairs, Odo is the first author to apply this principle throughout an entire book of fables. Odo regularly groups together animal fables that are based on similar motifs, and he often appends to the end of a series of animal fables a fable with human characters rather than animals. The opening fables of his collection provide a tour-de-force example of this method of organizing the fables into clusters based on shared plot motifs. Odo begins with a Biblical fable of the "trees choosing a king," followed by three other stories about animals choosing a king. Odo then closes the series with a story about monks in search of a good abbot to rule over them. By starting the series with an Old Testament story and ending with a story of monastic life, Odo gives the entire project a Christian orientation. As Odo proceeds from the opening Biblical fable to the humorous tales about the animals and finally the humorous tale about the monks, he faces a continual series of challenges, as he must define a Christian vocabulary of interpretation that is prepared to uncover (or invent) a high moral purpose conveyed by these stories, making the fables into bearers of new meanings that are often markedly different from the earlier Aesopic tradition of ancient Greece and Rome.

### ***Odo's First Fable: The Trees Choose a King***

After a prologue in which Odo promotes the use of exempla as part of a Christian spiritual enterprise, he begins the book with a fable taken from the Bible, the story of the

trees selecting a king, as reported in the Book of Judges:<sup>27</sup>

Et quoniam tractatus est parabolicus, a parabola libri Iudicum exordium sumamus. Iverunt ligna, ut ungerent super se regem. Dixerunt Olive: Impera nobis. Que respondit: Numquid possum relinquere pinguedinem meam, qua Dii utuntur et homines, ut inter Ligna promovear? Venerunt ad arborem Ficus, et dixerunt: super nos regnum accipe. Respondit: Numquid possum deserere dulcedinem meam fructusque suavissimos, ut inter Ligna promovear? Venerunt ad Vitem, ut imperaret eis. Que respondit: nunquid possum deserere vinum quod letificat Deum et homines? Et noluit promoveri. Dixeruntque Ligna ad Rampnum: impera nobis. Respondit Rampnus: Si vere me regem constituitis, venite, et sub umbra mea quiescite; si non vultis, egrediatur ignis de Rampno, et devoret cedros Libani.

As this is a collection of parables, let us take our beginning from a parable in the Book of Judges [*et quoniam tractatus est parabolicus, a parabola libri Iudicum exordium sumamus*]. The trees came together so that they could anoint a king to rule over them. They said to the olive tree: Be our ruler. The olive tree answered: Why would I abandon the richness of my oil, which is valued by both gods and men, for the sake of being promoted to be head of the trees? They came to the fig tree and said: Agree to rule over us. The fig tree answered: Why would I relinquish my sweetness and the tastiness of my fruits for the sake of being promoted to be head of the trees? They came to the vine, in order that the vine might rule over them, but the vine answered: why would I relinquish the wine which makes both God and men rejoice? And the vine did not accept promotion. The trees then said to the thorn bush: Rule over us. The thorn bush answered: If indeed you have resolved to have me be your king, come, and rest under my shadow; if you decline, a fire will come forth from the thorn bush and devour the cedars of Lebanon.

In placing this Biblical fable at the opening of his collection, Odo has attempted to find a scriptural authorization his project: *et quoniam tractatus est parabolicus, a parabola libri Iudicum exordium sumamus*. Odo follows the Vulgate text of the story with only

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<sup>27</sup> Odo 1 = Perry 262. The only manuscript attestation for this fable in a Greek Aesopic collection is a 15th-century Greek manuscript labeled Mb by Perry in his *Aesopica* (Codex Vat. gr. 777, fol. 15-106). For an older association between this fable and the Aesopic tradition, see the discussion of fables in Augustine, *Contra mend.* 28 and also Isidore, *Erym.* 1.40.

minor differences,<sup>28</sup> occasionally reducing the Biblical version but at no point daring to elaborate on the contents of the fable.<sup>29</sup> Yet in his interpretation of the fable, Odo supplies a long commentary of his own invention, and only briefly mentions the Biblical context of the fable. This represents the same tendency we have seen throughout the written collections of Aesopic fables: even though Aesopic fables were oral performances in specific social and historical contexts, the written collections detach the fables from their contexts and present them in a serial form. Thus, while Odo shows a very strict and scrupulous attitude towards the Biblical content of the fable, repeating it almost verbatim, he is far less interested in the Biblical context of the fable, which is as follows:<sup>30</sup> after Abimelech and the men of Shechem have cruelly murdered Jotham's seventy brothers, Jotham compares Abimelech to the thorn bush, and equates the men of Shechem who have gone over to Abimelech with the trees who have given themselves over to the protection of the thorn bush, a vicious and unworthy ruler.<sup>31</sup> Odo, on the other hand,

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<sup>28</sup> Judges 9.8-15. In each case Odo's text is shorter and simpler than the Vulgate. The Vulgate reads *et dii et homines* where Odo has *dii et homines*; the Vulgate has *et venire ut inter ligna promovear* where Odo simply has *ut inter ligna promovear* (and similarly *et ire ut inter ligna promovear* where Odo again has simply *ut inter ligna promovear*); etc.

<sup>29</sup> It is also worth noting that the fable shows up twice in the parables which Hervieux culled from Odo's sermons, listed under *Parabolae* 140 and *Parabolae* 178 (in Hervieux, vol. IV).

<sup>30</sup> For a quite different version of the "trees," in some sense still connected to the Old Testament precedent of Jotham's fable but drastically revised by a recombination with motifs from the New Testament parables, see the fable of the trees appended to one of the Odo manuscripts (*Collectio Secunda* 13 in Hervieux, IV.395).

<sup>31</sup> See also Yehuda Feliks's interesting comments on the natural realia of this story (1981: 39-42), beginning with the problematic identification of the Hebrew *atad*, which is translated as *rhamnos* in the Septuagint, *ramnus* in the Vulgate, Feliks identifies the

is not interested in the way that the fable is applied to this particular situation in the Bible; instead, he proceeds to interpret the fable item by item according to his own allegorical framework, unveiling "mystically" the inner meaning of each element of the fable. It is a full-blown sermon, far more elaborate than the epimythium found in any traditional collection of Aesopic fables, and considerably more elaborate than the allegorical interpretation of "the fox, the crow, and the cheese." Yet this elaborate sermon still depends on the same simple techniques that we have already seen, beginning with an item-by-item description of the characters of the fable, starting with the trees themselves:

Mistice. Ligna significant homines silvestres, monachos, congregationem sine pastore.

Mystically. The trees symbolize men living in the woods [*homines silvestres*], monks, a flock without a pastor.

In this case, Odo has decided that the trees are monks because monks are men who live in the woods (*homines silvestres*), which is to say, they do not live in the city: the trees are able to symbolize monks because the monks live where there are trees.<sup>32</sup> This is an

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plant as a boxthorn, and notes that it was customarily used as a hedge planted around orchards. Accordingly, "the boxthorn grew proud and boastful and began to regard itself as a savior and defender of the orchard trees surrounded by its hedge."

<sup>32</sup> But note a completely opposite interpretation in one of Odo's sermons (Parabola 140 in Hervieux, vol. IV). In this case, Odo views the trees as undesirable characters who are not even worth ruling over: *Sic multi nolunt relinquere pinguedinem gracie, nec dulces fructus bonorum operum, nec vinum spiritualis leticie, quo inebriantur contemplativi, ut preficiantur lignis silvarum, id est hominibus incultis*. This negative characterization of the trees seeking a king (*homines inculti*) is closer to the Biblical context, given that the men of Shechem to whom Jotham is preaching are not neutral parties in the conflict, but rather the mistaken enemies whom he is seeking to persuade.

admittedly strained interpretation, but it is typical of Odo's approach, and very different from what we are used to finding in the epimythia of traditional Greek and Latin fables. When applying an Aesopic fable to the human condition, the ancient editors did not seek to explain an intrinsic link between the characters of the story and the moral: if the fox did something smart, then the fox could serve as the symbol of the wise man, *callidus* or *sapiens*; if the fox happened to do something stupid, then he could be equated with the *stultus*. Nothing in particular about the fox (his coat, his color, his tail, his teeth) was necessarily implicated in the process of metaphorically relating the fox's behavior to human society. In traditional Aesopic morals, the overall thrust of the plot was sufficient to ground the metaphor. For Odo, however, it is necessary to link this fable about trees to the interpretation involving monks based on a specific link between trees and monks: it is not enough to say that these trees represent monks; there must be some reason why the trees, in particular, represent monks. Hence the need to specify that the trees, *ligna*, are connected with *homines silvestres*, because *ligna* grow in the *silvae*. To call monks by the name *homines silvestres* is admittedly odd, and Odo acknowledges the oddness of the trope by immediately glossing the words *homines silvestres* with an explanatory *monachi*, as if Odo's readers would not necessarily understand this unexpected turn of phrase.

Having begun his interpretation with this precise albeit highly artificial association of *ligna* with *homines silvestres*, Odo switches to another technique when he interprets the olive tree, which he glosses by means of a descriptive use of the genitive case. This allows Odo to specify that the olive's oil is no longer just oil, but the "oil of charity":

Veniunt ut eligant Olivam, aliquem iustum, qui respuens dicit quod non vult relinquere pinguedinem caritatis et ad dignitatem promoveri.

They came to choose the olive, a certain righteous man, who refusing their offer says that he does not want to abandon the oil of charity [*pinguedinem caritatis*] and be put in an eminent position.

The oil of the olive is the oil of charity, so the olive tree is a charitable man, who possesses the *pinguedinem caritatis*.<sup>33</sup> With the same kind of verbal inventiveness used to equate the trees with the monks (*ligna* and *homines silvestres*), Odo is able to explain why the olive is used as a symbol for the man of charity.

Similarly, Odo interprets the fig tree as an allegorical symbol of a pious person. To advance this interpretation, Odo applies the word *suavis* to both the sweet fruits of the tree and the sweet "fruits" of the man. Odo also attaches a genitive gloss to the man's *dulces fructus* to interpret these metaphorical fruits as the "fruits of good works," *fructus bonae operationis*.<sup>34</sup>

Arbor Ficus significat iustum qui, contemplando frequenter, degustat quam suavis, quam dulcis est Dominus, et facit dulces fructus bone operationis, et quia in dignitatibus multe sunt amaritudines, multe turbationes, non vult dulcedinem suam pro dignitatibus commutare.

The fig tree symbolizes the righteous man who, by constant prayer, tastes how sweet, how delicious [*quam suavis, quam dulcis*] is the Lord, and makes sweet

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<sup>33</sup> Of course, this kind of glossing by means of a genitive is a completely unconstrained rhetorical device. In this interpretation of the fable, Odo sees the oil as being the oil of charity, but on another occasion (Parabola 140 in Hervieux, vol. IV), Odo glosses the oil as the oil of grace, *pinguedinem gracie*, and as the oil of good works, *pinguedinem bone operationis* (the same phrase that he uses later on in the fable to describe the fruits of the fig tree, the *fructus bonae operationis*).

<sup>34</sup> Note that in his gloss of the fig's fruit in one of his sermons (Parabola 178 in Hervieux, vol. IV), Odo does not refer to good works but rather to meditation: *dulcedinem contemplacionis*.

fruits of good works [*dulces fructus bone operationis*], and does not want to exchange his sweetness for high office because in high office there is much bitterness, and much disturbance.

The final positive example among the trees is the vine, which Odo glosses with a Biblical citation, slightly altering the text in a way that adapts it to the qualities of the vine. Because the vine produces wine, it is the source of joy and hilarity, a joy and hilarity which Odo quickly glosses as spiritual rather than earthly. The vine is thus transformed into the sign of a good conscience.<sup>35</sup>

Vinea est vir iustus, qui gaudet spiritali hilaritate qui dicit: Gaudium nostrum est testimonium conscientie nostre.

The vine is the righteous man who rejoices in spiritual hilarity and says: Our joy is the proof of our conscience [*Gaudium nostrum est testimonium conscientie nostre*].

Odo's Biblical proof-text for this passage is from Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians:<sup>36</sup> *Nam gloria nostra haec est testimonium conscientiae nostrae*, "for this is our fame, the proof of our conscience." Although the Biblical passage does not mention vine or wine, it provides Odo with the spiritual message that he wants to find in the story of the trees, which he reads as a tale of spiritual hilarity and good conscience (*gaudium nostrum est testimonium conscientie nostre* = *gloria nostra haec est testimonium conscientiae nostrae*). Odo then proceeds to an interpretation that goes

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<sup>35</sup> The citation is not a verbatim quotation and as such it is not acknowledged by Hervieux in his notes, and consequently it is not noted in Jacobs's commentary on his English translation of the fables (1985), which seems to depend on Hervieux for its Biblical references.

<sup>36</sup> II Corinthians 1.12.

beyond the Biblical text to express more of his own interests and concerns.<sup>37</sup> Odo is, in fact, moving progressively farther and farther from the import of the original Biblical story in the Old Testament. Instead of turning to the story of Abimelech which provides a Biblical explanation for the meaning of the fable, Odo proposes other, extra-Biblical stories which he wants to link to these Old Testament trees. These anecdotes (we might even call them "gossip") are far removed from the world of Abimelech and instead provide contemporary evidence of the woes that attended ecclesiastical promotion in medieval Europe:

Quoniam multe sunt amaritudine, multe turbationes in fastidio dignitatis, ideo nolunt promoveri. Unde Taurinensis Canonicus, cum respuerit electionem, cito transivit, et socio suo se aperuit. Quesitus quare non recepit episcopatum, respondit: Si fuisset de numero episcoporum, fuisset de numero dampnandorum. Item, cum Magister H. factus fuisset episcopus Meldensis, et visitasset socios suos Parisius, dixit: Si haberem mortalem inimicum et desiderarem ei aliquid pessimum, orarem quod Deus faceret eum episcopum, et hoc pro maxima maledictione reputarem.

Because there is much bitterness and no peace of mind in the haughtiness of an eminent position, such men do not want to be elevated. Therefore the Canon of Toro, when he had refused election, quickly moved away. He explained his reasons to a colleague, who asked him why he had not accepted the bishopric, by saying, "If I had found myself enrolled among the bishops, I would have been enrolled among the damned." Likewise, when Master H. had been made Bishop of Meaux and was visiting his colleagues in Paris, he said to them: "If I had a mortal enemy and wished to do the greatest possible injury to him, I would pray to God to make him a bishop, and I would consider this a curse of the highest order."

The inclusion of these contemporary anecdotes seems to depend on the same affinity between the Aesopic fable and the "apophthegmata" tradition that also encouraged

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<sup>37</sup> Compare a different gloss on the vine in one of Odo's sermons (Parabola 140 in Hervieux, vol. IV): *vinum spiritualis leticie, quo inebriantur contemplativi*.



Phaedrus to include contemporary anecdotes in his fables: where Odo tells stories about the Canon of Toro and the Bishop of Meaux, Phaedrus included witty anecdotes about Augustus, Tiberius, and Pompey among his poems.<sup>38</sup> Yet there is an important difference here between Phaedrus and Odo: Phaedrus made this gossip the subject-matter of individual poems, but Odo subordinates these anecdotes to the overall framework of a traditional fable. In other words, Odo does not introduce these stories because of their independent merit (making them into free-standing stories, as Phaedrus does); these anecdotes are instead introduced into Odo's text only insofar as they further his interpretation of the fable of the trees.

After having thus supplied some contemporary evidence for the moral that he wants to uncover in this fable, Odo then returns to finish his inventory of the trees, now calling attention to the contrast between the good trees (bishops) which sustain the church with their pillars and beams (perhaps meant to suggest the image of wood?), while righteous men bear fruit (definitely like trees) that is destined to last into eternity. All this upright and fruitful activity stands in sharp contrast to the works of the useless thorn bush:

Tamen, cum sint columpne celi et cardines templi, Ecclesiam Dei gubernant, et sustentant, et qui iusti sunt nobilem fructum animarum faciunt in vitam eternam. Rampnus inutilis libenter episcopatum recipit. Rampnus est frutex spinosus, carens umbra, et quandoque de se ignem ex nimia siccitate emittit. Sic impius qui nullam habet umbram refrigerii vel consolationis, dicit: Requiescite sub umbra mea. Multa enim bona promittit. Sed ignem avaricie, superbie, luxurie de se emittit, et sic ligna, id est subditos, per pravum exemplum comburit. Ita Sichimite elegerunt Abimelech qui eos combussit.

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<sup>38</sup> For a discussion of this important component of Phaedrus's poems, see Chapter 3, p. ?.

In any case, because they are the pillars of the vault and the beams of the church, they direct the assembly of God, and sustain it, and those who are righteous bear the worthy fruit of souls unto eternity. But the useless thornbush freely accepts the bishopric. The thorn bush is a prickly plant, offering no shade, and whenever it becomes overly dry it sends forth fire. So too the impious man who does not offer any shade of cooling or consolation says: Rest beneath my shade. Indeed, he promises many good things. But he sends forth from himself the fire of avarice, pride and luxury, and thus the trees, that is his subordinates, are burned up by his wicked *exemplum*. So the Shechemites elected Abimelech who burned them up.

The conclusion of Odo's interpretation thus represents a rhetorical posture entirely different from the conclusion of the fable in its Biblical context (to which Odo refers only briefly at the end of his sermon). For Odo, the fire of the thorn bush turns into an abstract allegory of the "fire of avarice, pride, and luxury." Such a fire is not a real fire at all, but a symbolic fire: "the fire of avarice" means avarice itself, a sin rather than a physical phenomenon.<sup>39</sup>

### ***Other Animals Choosing a King***

Yet even Odo does not remain long in allegorical mode and returns to the inherent appeal of a story with a plot: having finished his explication of the Biblical story of the trees choosing their king, Odo then moves on to a series of three Aesopic fables which exemplify the same theme of choosing a ruler unwisely. First there are the ants, then the

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<sup>39</sup> Compare an additional gloss on the fire found in one of Odo's sermons (Parabola 178 in Hervieux, vol. IV): *ignis iracundie*. In Judges 9.48 ff. Abimelech really does set fire to the Shechemites: after they revolt against his oppressive rule, he burns them to death, trapped in their own city. *Sero sapiunt Phryges*.

hens, and finally the foolish chicks:<sup>40</sup>

Simile Formice elegerunt sibi Lignum in regem, et minxerunt super illud, et elegerunt Serpentem, et devoravit illas. Galline semel elegerunt Serpentem in regem qui devoravit eas. Pulli celebraverunt capitulum, ut eligerent sibi alium regem. Dixit unus sapiencior aliis: Eligamus Columbam, animal simplex, que nec laniat, ned ledit, nec devorat. Fecerunt sic. Columba simplex inter Pullos conversebatur. Dixerunt Pulli: Rex noster nichil valet, quoniam non percutit, non laniat. Dixerunt alii: Deponamus eum. Quem igitur eligemus? Dixerunt ad invicem: Eligamus Milvum. Factum est ita. Milvus, rex constitutus, uno dei cum rostro et unguibus laniavit unum Pullum et devoravit, postea alium et tertium, et sic per pravum regem afflicti sunt populi. Sic plerique non sunt contenti benigno rege, simplice episcopo, innocente abbate. Eligunt perversum qui omnes destruit. Ideo necessarium est quandoque picare subditos et percutere, quandoque ungere, quandoque ungere, ne superbiant, nec ex nimia afflictione tristentur.

Similarly the ants chose a tree to be the king [*simile formice elegerunt sibi lignum in regem*], and they urinated on it, and then they chose a serpent, and it devoured them. The chickens also once chose a serpent to be their king who devoured them. The chicks then called a meeting so that they might elect another king. One chick who was wiser than the rest [*sapiencior aliis*] said, "Let us elect the dove, a simple creature [*eligamus columbam, animal simplex*], who does not slash anything, or wound anything, or devour anything." That is what the chicks did, and the simple dove [*columba simplex*] lived among the chicks [*inter pullos conversebatur*]. But the chicks said, "Our king isn't any good, because he doesn't strike, he doesn't slash." The other chicks said, "Let's get rid of him, and whom shall we elect next?" They said to one another, "Let's elect the kite." And so they did. The kite, having been made king, one day slashed a chick with its beak and talons and devoured it, and then afterwards a second and a third, and so on account of this wicked king the people suffered greatly. So too there are many who are not content with a benign king [*benigno rege*], with a simple bishop [*simplice episcopo*], a harmless abbot [*innocente abbate*]. They instead choose a criminal who destroys them all. Therefore it is sometimes necessary to annoy and strike one's subjects, and sometimes to pierce them but sometimes to anoint them, so that they do not become proud but also so that they do not become sorrowful from too much affliction.

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<sup>40</sup> The ants are Odo 1a (no Perry number). The story of the hens and the chicks is Odo 1cd = Perry 486. The ants also appear in one of Odo's sermons (*Parabola* 178 in Hervieux, vol. IV): *sicut formice, quibus lignum datum est in regem: minxerunt super illud, et postea datus est serpens qui devoravit eas*.

With the word *simile* -- *simile Formice elegerunt sibi Lignum in regem* -- Odo declares a connection between the first fable that he has told, the Biblical story of the trees choosing a king, and the story of the ants who choose a king. Yet at the same time that there is a similarity between the stories (they have in common the motifs of "choosing a king," "the tree as king," and "the king who attacks his own subjects"), there is also an important difference in plot. The Biblical story is based on the trees soliciting various benevolent candidates who all refuse the post; the trees then go to the vicious candidate, who makes false promises to them but also speaks to them in a threatening way. There is, in effect, no real plot to the Biblical story, and the election of the king is not actually described; just as in the prose version of "the belly and the members," the entire fable consists of a dialogue, without the narrative of any actual events.<sup>41</sup>

In the story of the ants, however, the plot consists more of a series of events rather than a dialogue: the ants first choose a harmless king, a log, and they then proceed to insult this harmless king by urinating on him, preferring instead a more forceful king, the serpent, to whom they themselves fall victim. Thus, unlike the Bible story, the fable of the ants depends upon the plot, rather than the dialogue, to make its point. Moreover, the story of the ants contains a motif in the plot which is completely lacking in the Biblical fable of the trees choosing their king: when the ants choose a harmless king, they become disgusted with him and insult him. In the Biblical story, on the other hand, the harmless rulers refuse the offer made by the trees; there is no

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<sup>41</sup> For the various versions of the belly and the members (Perry 130), see Part Two of Chapter 2.

rejection of the benevolent king in the Biblical fable.

This element of dissatisfaction with a benevolent ruler is actually the key factor in the following story, the fable of the birds choosing a king. The chicks first choose a dove to be their ruler but are dissatisfied with the dove's benevolent leadership: "Our king isn't any good, because he doesn't strike, he doesn't slash." Yet if we turn to the Aesopic fable from which Odo derives this story -- Phaedrus's fable of the doves and the kite<sup>42</sup> -- we will see that Phaedrus's fable does not contain this motif of the birds' scorn for their benevolent king. In Phaedrus, the sly kite persuades the foolish doves to accept him as their king, whereupon he devours them, but there is no mention in Phaedrus of a benevolent king deposed in favor of the kite. How then to explain Odo's version of the story here? In order to provide a kind of genetic account of this story, it makes sense to assume that Odo decided to "cross" the story of the doves and the kite with the famous Aesopic fable of the frogs who elected a king. Indeed, it is even possible that the fable about the ants is itself Odo's own invention, directly modeled on the story of the frogs.<sup>43</sup> The presence of the fable of the frogs is so strongly implied in this series of stories that in some of the Odo manuscripts the editor adds a version of the frogs' story, inserting it between Odo's story of the ants and the stories of the hens and their chicks:<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Phaedrus 1.31 = Perry 486, cited on p. 26.

<sup>43</sup> Odo was not the first medieval author to have noted the connection between the frogs and their king and the story of the doves and the kite; the two fables regularly appear next to each other in the medieval Romulus tradition (see Hervieux II.138, II.175-176, and II.204-205).

<sup>44</sup> Hervieux prints this fable in an appendix to the fables, with a list of the manuscripts in which it is found (IV.248). Jacobs chooses to include it as one of Odo's fables in his English translation (1985).

Similiter rane consilium inierunt, ut regem sibi facerent. Elegerunt sibi quoddam lignum et erexerunt in regem. Tandem ascendentes super illud, conculcaverunt dicentes: Quia res noster nullius est valoris, deponamus eum. Quem igitur eligemus? Et communi consilio elegerunt serpentem, qui eos laniando devoravit.

Likewise, the frogs held a council in order to appoint a king. They chose a certain log to rule over them and raised him to the throne. But leaping upon him, they trampled him and said: Because our king has no dignity, let's depose him. And whom shall we then elect? By common agreement they chose the serpent, who tore them to pieces and devoured them.

This famous story of the frogs devoured by the water snake is no doubt the model for Odo's story of the ants and it also appears to be the model for his version of the birds choosing a king. Yet unlike the inert tree who is the frog's first king, the birds initially choose a simple dove, a *simplex columba*, to rule over them. This shift in motif is clearly related to the symbolic value of the dove in Christian culture and also to a transformation of the word *simplex*, a shift in meaning which has profound reverberations for the genre of the Aesopic fable. In the Aesopic tradition, the *simplex* was a simpleton, a fool, another variety of *stultus* who is regularly the butt of the joke in Aesop's fables. In Christian culture, however, *simplex* comes to mean something else entirely: paradoxically, this basic term of abuse in the Aesopic fables becomes a term of praise in the Christian tradition, and thus forces a re-interpretation of traditional Aesopic rhetoric.

### ***Eligamus columbam, animal simplex***

In order to trace the emergence of the use of *simplex* in Odo's version of the story -- *eligamus columbam, animal simplex* -- we will have to begin with Phaedrus's version

of the same story, in which the doves elect the kite as their king:<sup>45</sup>

Qui se committit homini tutandum improbo,  
auxilium dum requirit, exitium invenit.  
Columbae saepe cum fugissent milvum,  
et celeritate pennae vitassent necem,  
consilium raptor vertit ad fallaciam  
et genus inerme tali decepit dolo:  
Quare sollicitum potius aevum ducitis  
quam regem me creatis icto foedere,  
qui vos ab omni tutas praestem iniuria?  
illae credentes tradunt sese milvo;  
qui regnum adeptus coepit vesci singulas  
et exercere imperium saevis unguibus.  
tunc de reliquiis una: Merito plectimur,  
huic spiritum praedoni quae commisimus.

The person who turns to a scoundrel for help when he is in trouble will bring about his own destruction. When the doves had many a time fled from the kite and escaped death by the swiftness of their wings, the predator tried giving deceptive advice, and he fooled the defenseless flock with this trick [*dolo*]: "Why do you prefer this anxious way of life? Instead you could strike an agreement and make me your king, so that I would keep you safe from all possible danger." The doves believed the kite and put themselves in his care. Having been made king, the kite began to feast on them one by one, asserting his authority with fierce talons. Finally one of the surviving doves admitted: "We deserve to be punished [*merito plectimur*] for having given our life's breath over to this brigand."

As a result of foolishly believing the promises of the kite, the doves pay the ultimate penalty, suffering what they deserve: *merito plectimur*. In the medieval Romulus tradition, the story emerges in basically the same form:<sup>46</sup>

Columbae cum semper fugerent, et celeritate pennarum vitassent necem, consilio raptor vertit fallaciam, et genus incertum decipit hoc modo: Cur sollicitum non eligitis unum, qui vos defendat? Cur me non eligitis pacto foederis regem, ut nos ab omnibus praestem iniuriis? At illae credentes tradunt se milvo. Qui regnum

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<sup>45</sup> Phaedrus 1.31 = Perry 486, cited earlier on p. 26.

<sup>46</sup> Fabulae Antiquae 22 (Hervieux II.139) = Perry 486.

adeptus coepit vesci singulas et imperium saevis unguibus exercere. Una ex reliquis: Sic merito agitur, qui nostrum spiritum tali credidimus inimico. Qui se committit tutandum homini, auxilium cum quaerit, exitium invenit.

When the doves were always having to flee and to elude death by the swiftness of their wings, the predator disguised his guile with a trick and deceived the uncertain flock as follows: Why don't you settle on one source of worry and let him defend you? Why don't you contract an arrangement to elect me as your king, so that I might defend you from all threats? And the trusting doves turned themselves over to the kite who, having seized the reins of power, began to eat the doves one by one and to exercise his authority with his deadly talons. One of the doves who was left said: What has happened, happens rightly [*sic merito agitur*], since we entrusted our lives to such an enemy. The person who turns to a scoundrel for assistance when he is in trouble will bring about his own destruction [*qui se committit tutandum homini, auxilium cum quaerit, exitium invenit*].

This prose paraphrase follows Phaedrus's version of the story very closely, with the only real difference being that Phaedrus's promythium has been turned into an epimythium, quoted (almost verbatim) at the end of the story: Phaedrus reads *qui se committit homini tutandum improbo, / auxilium dum requirit, exitium invenit*, which is almost identical to the words of the prose paraphrase, *qui se committit tutandum homini, auxilium cum quaerit, exitium invenit*. In addition to this quotation of Phaedrus's "moral" to the story, there are many other phrases taken verbatim from Phaedrus's text into the paraphrase, as is typical of the early Romulus tradition (and which has even prompted scholars to attempt to reconstruct lost poems of Phaedrus from these prose paraphrases).<sup>47</sup> Yet in Odo's text there are not any notable verbal echoes between Odo's Latin and this prose

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<sup>47</sup> Prose: *Columbae cum semper fugerent* = Phaedrus: *Columbae saepe cum fugissent milvum*; Prose: *et celeritate pennarum mutassent necem* = Phaedrus: *et celeritate pennae vitassent necem*; Prose: *consilio raptor vertit fallaciam* = Phaedrus: *consilium raptor vertit ad fallaciam*; Prose: *et genus incertum decipit hoc modo* = Phaedrus: *et genus inerme tali decepit dolo*; etc.



paraphrase of Phaedrus's poem; as is often the case, Odo does not appear to have been working directly from the Romulus tradition of the fables.

Yet over time, even the Romulus tradition itself becomes less and less faithful to the prose paraphrase of Phaedrus, and many innovations, both in language and plot, enter into the stories.<sup>48</sup> In some cases, in fact, the stories become more and more "Aesopic" as they free themselves from the mannerisms peculiar to Phaedrus's versions of the fables. In the later Romulus Nilantius version of the doves and the kites, for example, there is a marked increase in the language of "foolishness" used to describe the doves and the stupid mistake that they make in choosing their king:<sup>49</sup>

Propalat subsequens fabula, quod malum sequitur simplicibus hominibus qui se tutandos malivolis et fallacibus credunt. Ferunt fabule iam dudum simplices columbas milvum elegisse sibi rectorem ac defensorem, quem antea asperum et infestum frequenter habuerant, putantes tuciores esse sub illo, si illum dominum sibi acciperent, multo magis quam ante inimicus eis fuerat. Quarum cumque imperium ille libenter accepisset et devoraret singlas, similans eis leges imponere et corripere illos, tunc una ex illis ita respondisse fertur: Melius nobis fuerat importuni milvi inimicitias pati quam sub sua potestate ita cotidie necari; sed iuste et digne hec patimur, quia nos stulte tali commisimus seniori.

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<sup>48</sup> In many medieval Latin versions, the story of the doves and the kite becomes instead the story of the doves, the kite, and the hawk: at first, the doves are persecuted by the kite and they then decide that they will seek refuge with the hawk, electing him to be their king, whereupon he begins to devour them one by one, just like the kite in the original version of the story (see, for example, Hervieux II.205, II.252, II.427, II. 463, and II.484).

<sup>49</sup> Romulus Nilantius 2.2 (Hervieux II.527). The version in the Romulus Anglicus Cunctis Exortae Fabulae 20 (Hervieux II.579) also carries on the same basic plot of "doves and kite" while substituting the kite with a falcon: *columbe, variis adversancium insidiis atigate, regem habere decreverunt; elegerunt ergo falconem, sperantes quod ubiectis sibi parcere vellet eis et debellare superbos hostes earum* (this "epic" *debellare superbos* would seem to reflect rather well on the Latin erudition of our medieval fabulist).

The following fable reveals that bad things happen to foolish people [*simplicibus hominibus*] who believe that they will be defended by ill-willed and deceptive persons. The fables say that the foolish doves [*simplices columbas*] had chosen the kite to be their ruler and protector, the same kite whom they had formerly often regarded as fierce and hostile, but they thought that they would be much safer under his power, letting him rule over them, than as it was previously when he was their enemy. The kite gladly agreed to rule over them, but he then began to eat them up one by one, pretending to make rules over them and then to snatch them. One of the doves reportedly said: It would have been better for us to suffer the enmity of the savage kite than to thus die every day subjected to his power; but rightfully and worthily do we suffer these things [*iuste et digne hec patimur*], because we stupidly [*stulte*] entrusted ourselves to such a superior.

The text of the Romulus Nilantius is still clearly connected to Phaedrus's version of the story, and the endomythium of the two fables is extremely close: the earlier prose Romulus (cited above) has the wretched dove declare that the foolish birds are suffering just as they deserve, *sic merito agitur*, while the Romulus Nilantius reads, "but rightfully and worthily do we suffer these things (*iuste et digne hec patimur*), because we stupidly (*stulte*) entrusted ourselves to such a superior." Yet the Romulus Nilantius is in many ways a more fully Aesopic version of the story, precisely where it diverges from Phaedrus.<sup>50</sup> Unlike Phaedrus, the Romulus Nilantius focuses on the traditional Aesopic theme of the fool, the *stultus*, emphasizing this language of fools and foolishness in both the promythium and the endomythium of the story. The promythium explains that this is going to be a negative example of the bad things that happen to fools, *simplicibus*, and as soon as the story begins the doves, our protagonists, are declared to be foolish, *simplices*. In the endomythium, the dove finally recognizes the mistake that has been

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<sup>50</sup> This is true of the Romulus Nilantius in general, which is wonderful collection of stories that fully merits attention on its own terms, aside from its derivative relationship to the fables of Phaedrus.

made (a recognition that comes too late, as usual in Aesop's pitiless plots), and the dove describes this behavior explicitly as foolish: *stulte*.<sup>51</sup>

Yet if we turn to Odo's version of the story, the Aesopic plot of a foolish mistake has been fundamentally altered: Odo makes it clear that the chicks are not exactly wise to choose the kite as their king, but the motif of the *simplices columbae* has undergone a radical shift in Odo's version. Instead of telling a story about a flock of doves, Odo changes the protagonists of the story to "chicks," *pulli*, and the *simplex columba* now appears as the ideal ruler at the heart of the story. When the chicks set about choosing a king, it is a very wise chick among them (*sapiencior aliis*) who urges the election of a "simple" king:

Dixit unus sapiencior aliis: Eligamus Columbam, animal simplex, que nec laniat, ned ledit, nec devorat. Fecerunt sic. Columba simplex inter Pullos conversebatur. Dixerunt Pulli: Rex noster nichil valet, quoniam non percutit, non laniat.

One chick who was wiser than the rest [*sapiencior aliis*] said, "Let us elect the dove, a simple creature [*animal simplex*], who does not slash anything, or wound anything, or devour anything." That is what the chicks did, and the simple dove [*columba simplex*] lived among the chicks. But the chicks said, "Our king isn't any good, because he doesn't strike, he doesn't slash."

This use of *simplex* inverts the traditional rhetoric of the Aesopic fable, in which the *simplex*, like the *stultus*, was the focal point of the fable's derision, a negative exemplum that we would imitate at our own peril. For Odo, on the other hand, with his unmistakably Christian rhetoric, the word *simplex* has a positive meaning. These birds,

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<sup>51</sup> Compare the use of the *stolide* in the rhymed version of the Romulus Nilantius, *Fabulae Rhythmicæ* 2.2 (Hervieux II.729): *nam collis propriis stolide iuga dura dederunt*.

in fact, are stupid precisely because they reject the *simplex* ruler. This image of the *simplex columba* has an important Biblical precedent, in Jesus's exhortation to the apostles in Matthew 10.16: *Ecce ego mitto vos sicut oves in medio luporum, estote ergo prudentes sicut serpentes et simplices sicut columbae*, "Behold I send you as sheep into the midst of wolves, so be you wise as serpents and as simple as doves."<sup>52</sup> This pairing of the "wise" (*prudentes*) serpents and the "simple" (*simplices*) doves suggests something of the profound ambivalence in Christian culture towards intellectual sophistication in worldly life. A typical expression of this conflict is found in the passage from Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians which Odo himself quoted in his epimythium to the fable of the trees:<sup>53</sup>

Nam gloria nostra haec est testimonium conscientiae nostrae quod in simplicitate et sinceritate Dei et non in sapientia carnali sed in gratia Dei conversati sumus in mundo.

For this is our fame, the proof of our conscience: we have acted in this world [*conversati sumus*] in simplicity [*in simplicitate*] and in the sincerity of God, not in the wisdom of the flesh [*non in sapientia carnali*] but in the grace of God.

Given the close parallel Odo's "*columba simplex inter pullos conversebatur*" and Paul's own turn of phrase, "*in simplicitate...conversati sumus in mundo*," it seems likely that Odo had this passage from Paul in mind as he composed his Christian version of the fable of the chicks and the *simplex columba*. In this case, the opposition between heavenly and

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<sup>52</sup> In the corresponding passage in Luke 10.3 there is only the comparison to the sheep among the wolves; no mention is made of the doves and serpents.

<sup>53</sup> II Corinthians 1.12. This passage also seems to be implied in Odo's allegory of the fable of the trees, which contains the phrase *testimonium conscientiae nostrae*.

earthly things is used not only to praise heavenly *simplicitas* but to castigate carnal knowledge, *sapientia carnalis*.

### ***Simplices et subditos excoriant et perimunt***

The value placed on *simplicitas* can also be felt in Odo's version of a traditional Aesopic fable about partridges who are fooled by the weeping of the fowler. Although the partridges are foolish to believe those misleading tears, Odo does not want to condemn them for their simple credulity. Instead, he sees them as victims of the fowler's violence and deceit:<sup>54</sup>

Quidam calvus,<sup>55</sup> habens oculos lacrimantes, interficiebat perdices. Et ait una: Ecce quam bonus homo et sanctus! Et ait alia: Quare dicis eum bonum? Et respondit: Nonne vides qualiter lacrimatur? Et respondit altera: Nonne vides qualiter nos interficiet? Maledicte sint lacrimae ipsius, quia lacrimando nos perimit! Sic plerique episcopi, prelati, magnates, ut videtur, bene orant, eleemosinas dant, lacrimantur; sed simplices et subditos excoriant et perimunt. Maledicte sint orationes et lacrimae talium!

A certain bald man, whose eyes were filled with tears, was killing partridges. One of the partridges said, "Look, what a good and holy man!" And another partridge said, "Why do you say he is good?" And the first partridge responded, "Don't you see how he is weeping?" And the second answered, "Don't you see that he is going to kill us? A curse on his tears, because by weeping he is destroying us!" Thus many bishops, preachers, and potentates are seen to pray well, to give charity, and to weep: but they flay and destroy the simple folk and their subjects [*simplices et subditos*]. A curse on the prayers and the tears of such men!

Once again, Odo has refused the traditional framework on the Aesopic fable: instead of

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<sup>54</sup> Odo 8 = Perry 576.

<sup>55</sup> This *calvus* in Odo's text is unparalleled in the Latin tradition. The story is normally told about a man who is *lippus* (presumably suffering from eye troubles, and seeming to weep, because of working with birdlime).

blaming the simple-minded partridge who cannot tell the difference between true and false tears (as rightly pointed out by the second, wiser partridge), Odo feels only pity, and his heart goes out to the simple folk -- *simplices* -- who mistakenly trust the hypocritical people who are in power over them. The *simplices* have all of Odo's pity, and none of his scorn.<sup>56</sup>

If we turn to the Romulus tradition of the story, however, we find the word *simplex* being used with all its force as a way to blame the credulous bird for its stupid belief in the fowler's tears. So, for example, the version in the Romulus vulgaris reads:<sup>57</sup>

Sapientis consilium nullatenus pretermitti debere admonet nos subiecta auctoris fabula. In verno aves diversi generis dum exultarent et in nidis suis velate fronde sederent, aspiciunt aucupem lippum componere cannas suas et festucam inserere visco. Ille ignare et simplices aves sic inter se narrare coeperunt: Quam pium hominem aspiciamus, quia pro nimia bonitate lacrimae ex eius oculis fluunt quotiens nos aspicit! De quibus unus, aliis astutior et expertos habens omnes dolos aucupis, sic dixisse fertur: Heu fugite, simplices et innocentes aves, et ab hac vos eripite fraude. Pro qua re moneo, ut impigris alarum pennis vos ad aerem liberum volatu extollatis celeriter. Nam, si placet cognoscere ad eius opera, caute intendite et videte, quia quas fraude coeperit, mox morsu occisas aut prefocatas in cumbam reponit.

The author offers the following fable to warn us that we ought to in no way disregard the advice of a wise person [*sapientis consilium*]. One spring, birds of various species were chirping and sitting in their nests upon the leafy boughs when they saw a bird-catcher with watering eyes putting together his reeds and

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<sup>56</sup> Compare similar praise of *simplicitas* in Odo 39 (= Perry 605), in which the "simple" cat knows only one trick (how to climb a tree) as opposed to the many wiles of the fox: *Per cattum intelligimus simplices qui nesciunt nisi unicum artificium, scilicet salire in celum* (for similar uses of *simplex* see Odo 40, 50, and 68). The only use of "*simplex*" to mean "fool" in Odo's fables is in fable 42 (no Perry number), the story of the "village idiots": *quidam simplices, ut dicitur, Willebei*.

<sup>57</sup> Romulus Vulgaris 4.7 (Hervieux II.227).

applying birdlime to the trap. The ignorant and simple-minded birds [*ille ignare et simplices aves*] thus began to say to each other: What a pious man we see here, who pours forth tears from his eyes from the excessive goodness of his nature every time that he looks at us! But one of the birds, who was more crafty than the others [*aliis astutior*] and well aware of all the tricks of the bird-catcher, is said to have told them: Alas alack, run away, you simple-minded and innocent birds, [*simplices et innocentes aves*], and distance yourselves from this trap. For this reason, I urge you to swiftly lift yourselves up into the air on the untiring feathers of your wings. For if you prefer to get to know the man by his words, pay careful attention and you will see that those whom he captures in his trap he will put away in his sack after biting off their heads or strangling them.

In this case, the epimythium makes no condemnation of the fowler for his treatment of the birds; rather, the moral is directed against the stupid birds themselves and, in particular, their refusal to listen to the good advice offered by the wiser bird among them. Aesop, on the other hand, would have no pity for the *simplex* who is fooled by the fowler's tears. In the Aesopic tradition generally, the "simpleton" is an object of scorn who justifiably suffers the injuries that befall him (*merito plectimur*<sup>58</sup>).

With this parallel story in mind, we can now return to Odo's chicks choosing a king: they too ignore the advice of a wiser bird, *sapiencior aliis*, who realizes it would be a mistake to choose the kite as their king. Yet when Odo provides an epimythium for this story, he does not focus his attention on the advice of the wise bird, nor does he castigate the birds for the foolish mistake that they make. Instead, Odo focuses on the *simplex columba*, the innocent king that was briefly in their midst. It is this figure who interests Odo the most:

Sic plerique non sunt contenti benigno rege, simplice episcopo, innocentis abbate.  
Eligunt perversum qui omnes destruit. Ideo necessarium est quandoque picare

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<sup>58</sup> The words of the endomythium from Phaedrus's story of the doves and the kite, 1.31 = Perry 486 cited on p. 26.

subditos et percutere, quandoque pungere, quandoque ungere, ne superbiant, nec ex nimia afflictione tristentur.

Thus also there are many who are not content with a benign king [*benigno rege*], with a simple bishop [*simplice episcopo*], a harmless abbot [*innocentis abbate*]. They instead choose a criminal who destroys them all. Therefore it is sometimes necessary to annoy and strike one's subjects, and sometimes to pierce them but sometimes to anoint them, so that they do not become proud but also so that they do not become sorrowful from too much affliction.

As Odo's commentary makes clear, the word *simplex* has become synonymous with other positive Christian terms such as *innocens*. Indeed, Odo is not only exhorting people to be satisfied with their innocent, simple and benign rulers; he is also exhorting these lords to be more harsh with the people, indulging their ignorant desire: "Therefore it is sometimes necessary to annoy and strike one's subjects, and sometimes to pierce them but sometimes to anoint them, so that they do not become proud but also so that they do not become sorrowful from too much affliction." Thus, rather than focusing all his attention on the foolish people and attempting to persuade them to make fewer mistakes, Odo seems to have abandoned himself to their persistent foolishness, and instead turns to the lords themselves, and asks them to behave in a way that is compatible with the people's mistaken understanding of the world.

Odo actually tells a fable in which the *simplex dominus* does lash out unexpectedly at one of his subjects. In this case, we are dealing with a goat who finds himself the vassal of the donkey, a proverbially simple (and simple-minded) creature. The donkey is the butt of the joke in many Aesopic fables, but this time it is the goat who makes a foolish mistake:<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Odo 73 = Perry 623a.



Contra irreverentes dominos suos. Hircus semel factus est servus asini, et vidit eum simplicem et humilem. Ascendit asinum et voluit equitare. Asinus iratus erexit pedes anteriores et cecidit retro super dorsum suum, et hircum oppressit et interfecit, dicens: Si asinus est dominus tuus, ne equites ipsum. Sic plerique vident dominos suos simplices, vel senes, vel cecos, vel inhabiles; contempnunt eos et derident.

Against those who do not respect their masters. Once upon a time the goat found himself the servant of a donkey, and he saw that the donkey was simple and humble [*simplex et humilis*]. The goat got up on the donkey's back and wanted to ride him. The angry donkey stretched out his back legs and fell over backwards on his back and thus came down on top of the goat and killed him, saying, "If your master is a donkey, don't try to ride him!" So too many people see that their masters are simple [*simplices*] or old or blind or incapable; they condemn them and mock them [*contempnunt eos et derident*].

Although Odo is continuing his argument about the virtues of the *simplex dominus*, he has created a much more vicious, and hence Aesopic, story about the relationship between this humble (*humilis*) lord and his arrogant servant. The arrogance of the servant is suitably punished and, even better, the donkey himself pronounces the moral of the story, in a perfect Aesopic endomythium: *Si asinus est dominus tuus, ne equites ipsum*, "if your master is a donkey, don't try to ride him!" In this fable Odo thus manages to combine the conventions of the Aesopic tradition with the new demands of Christian rhetoric.

### ***The Human Coda: Monks Choosing an Abbot***

After telling four different stories about animals (and trees) choosing a king, Odo then proceeds to tell a similar story about monks choosing their abbot. This is our first example of one of the most interesting (and unusual) aspects of Odo's collection of fables, in which an animal fables are paired with stories about human characters. In

either case, the plot remains the same; it is only the characters who change.<sup>60</sup>

Et applicatur malis presidentibus et successoribus peioribus. Quidam abbas dedit monachis suis tria fercula. Dixerunt monachi: Iste parum dat nobis. Rogemus Deum quod cito moriatur, et sive ex hac causa, sive ex alia, cito mortuus est. Substitutus est alius qui tantum dedit duo fercula. Irati monachi et contristati dixerunt: Nunc magis orandum est, quia unum ferculum subtractum est, Deus subtrahat ei vitam suam. Tandem mortuus est. Substitutus est tertius, qui duo subtraxit. Irati monachi dixerunt: Iste pessimus est inter omnes, quia fame nos interficit. Rogemus Deum quod cito moriatur. Dixit unus monachus: Rogo Deum quod det ei longam vitam et manu teneat eum nobis. Alii admirati querebant quare hoc diceret. Qui ait: Video quod primus fuit malus, secundus peior, iste pessimus. Timeo, cum mortuus fuerit, alius peior succedet qui penitus fame nos peremit. Unde solet dici: Selde cum se betere, hoc est: Raro succedit melior.

This too can be applied to present circumstances which are bad and ensuing circumstances which are worse. A certain abbot gave his monks three meals a day. The monks said: He gives us too little. Let us pray to God that he will die soon, and whether for this reason or some other reason he did die soon afterwards. He was replaced by another abbot, who gave the monks only two meals a day. The angry and discouraged monks said: Now we have to pray even harder so that he will lose his life the same way we lost our meal. And he died. A third abbot arrived, who took away two meals, so the monks only had one meal a day. The angry monks said: This one is the worst of all, because he is starving us to death. Let us pray to God so that he will die right away. But one monk said: I will pray that God grant him a long life and keep him for us. The other monks were surprised, and asked why he said such a thing. The monk answered: I see that the first abbot was bad, the second was worse, and the third worst of all. I am afraid that if this one dies, he will be replaced by someone even worse who will starve us to death completely. Hence the proverb, "Selde cum se betere," which is to say: Things don't go from bad to better.

In this case, Odo does not have to provide an elaborate epimythium in which he relates the animal story to the world of human beings; this story is already firmly located with the human world, and specifically in the monastic world in which Odo too passed his life.

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<sup>60</sup> Odo also occasionally includes human anecdotes in the epimythia appended to the animal fables, as we saw in the fable of the trees choosing a king, Odo 1 (= Perry 262), which prompted Odo to tell a story about the Canon of Toro and about the Bishop of Meaux.

No allegorical treatment is required to shift the story into a Christian frame of reference. By including a purely "human" story in the carefully constructed series of animal fables, Odo thus builds a bridge between the specific genre of Aesopic fables and the larger body of "exemplum literature"<sup>61</sup> where it is usually humans, rather than animals, who are the primary actors.

### ***Ysemgrimus et Reinardus***

In addition to exemplum literature, Odo also incorporates another medieval genre into his animal fables: the beast epic tradition, featuring the exploits of the sly fox, called "Reinardus" in Odo, and his foolish antagonist, the wolf "Ysemgrimus." By using these names for the fox and the wolf in his stories, Odo conflates the fables of the beast epic tradition with the Aesopic corpus, and is apparently the first compiler in the Aesopic tradition to make this connection.<sup>62</sup> By bearing personal names, and by remembering their adventures from story to story, Reynard and Isengrimus are markedly different from the anonymous foxes and wolves of the Aesopic corpus. Yet despite this important psychological difference, the plots of the adventures in which Reynard and Isengrimus embroil themselves are very similar to the traditional plots of Aesopic fables, as we can see in this story of the fox and the wolf in the well, which is clearly a variation on the

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<sup>61</sup> See Tubach's *Index exemplorum* for a complete inventory of this medieval tradition.

<sup>62</sup> Among modern scholars, it is Rodriguez-Adrados who systematically attempts to include the stories from the beast-epic in his inventory of Aesopic fables.

story of the fox and the goat in the well which we have seen already several times before:<sup>63</sup>

De vulpe et lupo et situla putei. Vulpes casu cecidit per unam situlam in puteum. Venit Lupus et querebat quid faceret ibi. Que ait: Bone compater, hic habeo multos pisces et magnos; utinam mecum partem haberes! Et ait Ysemgrimus: Quomodo possem illuc descendere? Ait Vulpecula: Supra est una situla; pone te intus, et venies deorsum. Et erant ibi due situle; quando una ascendit, alia descendit. Lupus posuit se in situlam, que erat supra et descendit insum; vulpecula in alia sicula ascendit sursum. Et quando obviaverunt sibi, ait Lupus: Bone compater, quo vadis? Et ait Vulpe: Satis comedi et ascendo. Tu descende et invenies mirabilia. Descendit miser Lupus nec invenit aliquid nisi aquam. Venerunt mane rustici et extraxerunt Lupum, et usque ad mortem verberaverunt. Vulpeculis significat Diabolum qui dicit homini: Descende ad me in puteum peccati et invenies delicias et multa bona. Stultus adquiescit et descendit in puteum culpe, et ibi nullam invenit refeccionem. Tandem veniunt inimici et extrahunt impium, percuciunt et perimunt. Diabolus multa bona Ade promisit; sed multa mala persolvit.

Concerning the fox and the wolf and the well-bucket. By chance the fox fell in the well-bucket down into the well [*puteum*]. The wolf came and asked what he was doing down there. The fox said: Dear brother, here I have a good many fish, and big ones too; if only you could share them with me! And Ysemgrimus said: How can I get down there? The fox said: There's a well-bucket there at the top of the well; get inside, and you will make your way down. And there were two buckets at the well; when one came up, the other went down. The wolf got into one bucket, which was then at the top and he went down in it; the fox came up in the other bucket. And when they met, the wolf said: Dear brother, where are you going? And the fox said: I've had plenty to eat so I'm going up now. Go down and you won't believe what you see. The poor wolf went down and he didn't find anything there except water. In the morning the farmers came and pulled the wolf out of the well and flogged him within an inch of his life. The fox is a symbol of the Devil who says to you: Come down to me in the well of sin [*in puteum peccati*] and you will find delights and all sorts of good things. The fool [*stultus*] agrees and goes down into the well of blame, but there he finds no refreshment. Finally the enemies arrive [*tandem veniunt inimici*] and draw forth the sinner, and flog him and kill him. The Devil promised many good things to Adam, but he made good his promises only with many evils.

When Odo blames the wolf for his stupidity (*stultus*), he is following the Aesopic

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<sup>63</sup> Odo 19 = Perry 593.

framework in which the negative exemplum revolves around the foolish protagonist who makes a mistake. Yet Odo's fox does not pronounce the endomythium of the story and it is instead Odo who explains and glosses the story, calling attention not only to the wolf's stupidity but also to the symbolic apparatus of the story in which the well, Latin *puteum*, is an image of hell, the very pit in which the Devil resides. In the Greco-Roman tradition, Aesopic fables did not come equipped with this elaborate, symbolic apparatus; the well in which the goat found himself trapped was just a well, and that real, physical well of this world was enough to convey the message of the story. Thus, while Odo's story of the well bears some relationship to the Aesopic tradition, it has been markedly changed by the introduction of characters from the beast-epic genre, and by the application of allegorical techniques in the story's interpretation.

## **Part Two. The Problem of Justice in Odo**

Many of the allegorical techniques used by Odo depend upon the values attributed to animals in the larger Christian tradition. Odo's use of the *simplex columba*, for example, seems to have depended on the deep symbolic value of the dove in Christian rhetoric, and we will soon see that the same seems to be true of the innocent and suffering lamb in Odo's version of "the wolf and the lamb at the stream." Yet in other fables, Odo's reliance on standard Christian allegory can create a serious gap between the ostensible contents of the story and the allegorical interpretation. The lion, for example, as "king of the beasts," was regularly interpreted in Christian rhetoric as a symbol of God or of Jesus (an interpretation canonized, so to speak, in the opening chapter of the

Physiologus, which links the "lion of Judah" to the incarnation of Christ). This identification of the lion and the lord thus makes a profound impact on Odo's interpretation of the Aesopic fable of the lion's share, in which the lion commands first the ass and then the fox to divide the prey.<sup>64</sup> Odo adapts the cast of characters slightly, replacing the ass with the fox's regular enemy, the wolf:<sup>65</sup>

De leone et lupo et vulpe et venatoribus. Leo, Lupus et Vulpes condixerunt sibi ad invicem quod venarentur. Vulpes cepit anserem, Lupus arietem pinguem, Leo bovem macilentum. Debuerunt prandere. Dixit Leo Lupo quod predam partiretur. Dixit Lupus: Unusquisque habet quod cepit, Leo suum bovem, ego arietem, Vulpes anserem. Leo iratus erexit palmam, et cum unguibus extraxit totum corium de capite Lupi. Et dixit Leo Vulpi quod divideret. Et ait Vulpes: Domine, vos comedatis de pingue ariete, quantum volueritis, que teneras habet carnes, et postea de ansere, quantum volueritis, tandem de bove temperate que duras habet carnes, et quod remanserit detis nobis qui homines vestri sumus. Ait Leo: Certe bene dicis. Quis te docuit ita bene partiri? Et ait Vulpes: Domine, ille rubens capellanus socii mei, demonstrato capite excoriato. Sic Dominus percussit primum parentem pro peccato inobedientie, scilicet multis infirmitatibus, fame, siti, nuditate et tandem morte; quod rubens capellanus Ade deberet nos castigare, quod nunquam Deum offendere deberemus. In Parabolis: Castigato pestilente stultus sapientior erit. Quandoque verberatur catulus coram leone, ut timeat et mansuescat. Sic Dominus ergo verberavit triplicem leonem, ut nos, catuli miseri, timeamus et a peccato abstineamus. Verberavit, inquam, Sahan, verberavit primum Adam, verberavit secundum Adam, id est Christum. Unde vox Christi ad patrem: In me transierunt ire tue; quoniam flagellis, cruci et clavis ipsum exposuit et proprio filio non pepercit. Adhuc nos miseri non timemus. Potest Dominus dicere: Micius inveni quam te genus omne ferarum. Maledictus talis catulus qui, tam magnis leonibus verberatis, non timet et renuit castigari.

Concerning the hunters, the lion, wolf, and fox. The lion, wolf, and fox agreed amongst themselves to go hunting together. The fox caught a goose, the wolf caught a ram, and the lion caught a skinny cow. Dinner time arrived. The lion

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<sup>64</sup> There are a considerable number of versions of "the lion's share" in the Aesopic tradition, which pose a real dilemma for indexing the corpus. Perry has two items which feature this motif, Perry 149 and Perry 339.

<sup>65</sup> Odo 20 = Perry 149. This story is also connected to the beast-epic cycle (see Adrados M-225 and Tubach 3069).

told the wolf to divide the spoils. The wolf said: Let each one have what he caught; the lion his cow, me the ram, and the fox the goose. The lion was angry and stretched forth his paw and with his claws he peeled away all the skin from the wolf's head. And the lion then told the fox to do the dividing. And the fox said: Lord, please eat from the fat ram as much as you want, for its flesh is tender, and then eat of the goose, as much as you want, and then of the cow you might eat but in moderation, for it has tough flesh, and what is left shall be for those of us who are your men after all. The lion said: Indeed, you speak well. Who taught you to divide so well? And the fox said: Lord, my associate's red cap is what taught me, as his skinned scalp demonstrated. Thus the Lord struck our first father for his sin of disobedience, which is to say, he struck him with many afflictions, such as hunger, thirst, nakedness and even death. Therefore the red cap of Adam ought to chide us so that we ought never to offend the Lord. As it says in the Book of Proverbs: Being chided by the scourge the foolish man will become wiser [*castigato pestilente stultus sapientior erit*]. Sometimes the lion cub is flogged in the lion's presence, so that he will learn fear and become gentle [*ut timeat et mansuescat*]. It is for this reason that the Lord flogged the three-fold lion so that we, the poor cubs, might learn fear and refrain from sin. He flogged Satan, I tell you, and he flogged the first Adam, and he flogged the second Adam, that is Christ. Wherefore the voice of Christ called out to his father: Your wrath has turned against me. He spoke thus because God subjected him to floggings, to the cross and the nails, and did not spare his own son. And yet we wretches still do not fear. The Lord can thus say: I found every species of beast to be more gentle than you. Accursed is the cub who, however much you might flog the great lions, does not learn fear and refuses to be chided.

Odo here confronts a serious dilemma: on the one hand, his usual impulse to protest against the exploitation of the weak by the strong should lead him to condemn the lion for his brutal treatment of the wolf, putting the fox in the abject situation of surrendering the best of the spoils to the lion's show of force. As a vicious and greedy predatory, the lion could easily be cast as the "Devil" of this fable. Yet Odo proceeds in a completely different direction: instead of reading the lion as a predatory creature, like the kite or the hawk (who are regularly equated with the Devil), Odo is so swayed by the Christian tradition of reading the "lion" as a symbol of God or of Christ that he endorses the lion's behavior in the story, and even heightens the level of violence in his interpretive gloss

of the story.<sup>66</sup> The moral framework of this story depends not on justice, but on fear, and on the need for mankind to learn the fear of God. Again, this is a quite different argument from the "wit and wisdom" of the Aesopic fable. In the fox's riposte to the lion, there is a typical display of wisdom and of wit rather than of fear; the fable itself is, in fact, a perfect example of the Aesopic tradition, with an elegant (and ironic) endomythium pronounced by the fox. When Odo proceeds to interpret the story, however, the fox's elegant irony is instead transformed into a tirade of fear and punishment, driven by the theology of a vengeful, paternal God who is to be feared by all his human children.

### ***The Wolf and the Lamb at the Stream, Again***

Yet it would give the wrong impression to end this survey of Odo's fables with this vision of God's wrath, falling as it does on seemingly innocent victims whose only fault is their own sense of justice and resolute lack of fear. In other stories we have seen that Odo expresses a strong sense of divine justice, and his versions of traditional Aesopic fables often depend precisely on this quality of justice (much as we saw in Phaedrus's justice-oriented versions of the traditional tales). For example, Odo was deeply sympathetic towards the partridges who were fooled by the fowler's hypocritical tears.

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<sup>66</sup> The ambiguity of the lion as a Christian symbol causes a moment of unprecedented self-reflection in the *Physiologus*, when the author confronts the multiple, even opposite, meanings which can be conveyed by the animals (Carmody B-5): *Similiter et leo et aquila immunda sunt, sed ille ferarum rex est, et ille volatiliū; secundum ergo regnum Christo assimilata sunt, secundum rapacitatem vero Diabolo. Et alia multa sunt in creaturis habentia duplicem intellectum; alia quidem sunt laudabilia, alia vero vituperabilia; et differentia, sive morum, sive naturae distantia.*



It is thus not surprising to find that Odo agrees with Phaedrus in reading the story of the wolf and the lamb at the stream in justice-centered terms that are sympathetic to the lamb and implacably hostile to the wolf:<sup>67</sup>

De lupo et agno bibentibus. Contra opprimentes pauperes. Lupus et agnus biberunt de eodem rivulo, et ait lupo: Quare turbas aquam meam? Et ait agnus: Non turbo, quia vos bibitis superos, et aqua fluit de vobis ad me. Et ait lupo: Maledicte, contradicis mihi, et es ita audax? Et statim devoravit agnum. Ita divites pro nulla causa, qualitercumque respondeant pauperes, ipsos devorant.

Concerning the wolf and the lamb drinking. Against those who oppress the poor. A wolf and a lamb came to drink from the same stream, and the wolf said: Why are you muddying my water? And the lamb said: I'm not muddying the water, because you are upstream from me, and water flows down from you to me. And the wolf said: Accursed creature, do you contradict me, are you so bold as that? And straightaway he ate the lamb. Thus rich men, for no reason, no matter what the poor men say, devour them.

Here Odo places himself firmly on the side of the lamb, against the wolf. It is important to note that in this case the predatory creature is not interpreted as the Devil, but instead as a wicked rich man who has no reason exploits the poor mercilessly. Odo's understanding of this fable is thus basically identical to what we saw earlier in Phaedrus's version.<sup>68</sup>

Odo also judges the story of the wolf and the stork according to a Christian moral standard, in which the stork can only be commended for her efforts to help the wolf in his distress. Odo reads the wolf's words to the stork not as a biting endomythium but instead as the vicious tirade of a master towards his servant:<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Odo 24 = Perry 155.

<sup>68</sup> Phaedrus 1.1 = Perry 155, cited on p. 165, 229.

<sup>69</sup> Odo 6 = Perry 156.

De ciconia et lupo. Contra crudeles dominos male remunerantes. Semel Lupus fere ex uno osse strangulabatur. Quesitus fuit medicus. Dixerunt servientes: Ciconia habet longum rostrum et poterit os a gutture extrahere. Quesita est Ciconia; merces magna est promissa. Venit et os a gutture extraxit. Mercedem quesivit. Lupus nichil dare voluit, dicens: Nonne, quando caput tuum fuit in ore meo, potui te interficere? Nonne sufficit tibi quod permisi te vivere? Sic rustici et pauperes, quando serviunt, nullam mercedem habere possunt. Dicit enim dominus: Homo meus es; nonne magnum est, si te non excorio, si te vivere permitto.

Concerning the stork and the wolf, against cruel lords who give poor return for services rendered [*contra crudeles dominos male remunerantes*]. Once upon a time, the wolf was practically choking on a bone. A doctor was sought. The wolf's servants said: The stork has a long beak and would be able to extract the bone from your throat. The stork was sought, and a great reward promised. The stork came and extracted the bone from the wolf's throat. She asked for her reward. The wolf didn't want to give her anything, and said: What, couldn't I have killed you while your head was in my mouth? Isn't it enough that I spared your life? So too with farmers and the poor who are unable to claim their pay for the services they perform. For their lord says: You are my man; isn't it a great thing if I don't flay you alive, if I let you live?

In this case, Odo insists on a moral reading of the story which focuses on the wolf's callous wickedness, with no reference whatsoever to the bird's foolish behavior. Odo does not characterize this wolf as the Devil enticing mankind into a trap; instead, the wolf is a rich man, a sinful lord who oppresses the farmers and other men who must serve him. By refusing to place any blame on the stork and directing the full force of the fable against the wolf, Odo has gone even further than Phaedrus in his justice-centered revision of Aesop. Phaedrus, for example, follows the traditional framework of the "mistake," blaming the crane for having gotten herself into such trouble.<sup>70</sup>

Qui pretium meriti ab improbis desiderat,  
bis peccat: primum quoniam indignos adiuvat,  
impune abire deinde quia iam non potest.

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<sup>70</sup> Phaedrus 1.8 = Perry 156, cited on p. 23.

Someone who expects a reward for favors done to scoundrels is guilty of two mistakes [*bis peccat*]: first, because he helps those who are unworthy and second, because he cannot even hope to escape punishment himself.

According to Phaedrus, the long-beaked bird is twice mistaken (*bis peccat*), first because she agrees to help someone so bad as the wolf, and secondly because she expects to be rewarded for doing so. These concerns do not enter into Odo's reading of the story: Odo's sympathy is all with the bird and against the wolf. Indeed, while Phaedrus uses the promythium to mark the bird as the negative focus of the exemplum ("someone who expects a reward for favors done to scoundrels"), Odo uses the promythium to point already in the direction of the wolf: *contra crudeles dominos male remunerantes*, "against cruel lords who give poor return for services rendered." Odo retains the traditional plot of the fable, but provides it with a new Christian interpretation, which expects virtuous behavior to be rewarded more than it insists on foolish behavior being punished. In fact, within this Christian framework it would be rather difficult for Odo to accuse the bird of having sinned (in Phaedrus: *bis peccat*). Unlike the other animals who fall into the snares of the Devil or of the powers of this earth, this bird did what she did in an effort to help the wolf: for Odo the bird's deed is thus a simple act of charity, while for Aesop it is reckless simple-mindedness.

Equipped with this comprehensive set of Christian interpretations and interpretative procedures, Odo's collection of fables constitutes a profound and multi-faceted response to the Aesopic tradition. On the one hand, Odo supplies us with one of the most diverse and carefully organized collections of fables in the entire Aesopic tradition. In addition to providing us with new versions of traditional fables already

known from earlier written sources, Odo is our first (and sometimes only) written source for dozens of traditional Aesopic fables. Yet at the same time that Odo is writing within, and even furthering, the Aesopic tradition, he also stands outside that tradition, and even against it.<sup>71</sup> Odo's style of interpretation is allegorical, directly indebted to Biblical exegesis rather than to the Aesopic fable tradition. Moreover, the contents of Odo's interpretations are frequently "un-Aesopic," in that Odo tends to reject the traditional Aesopic focus on fools and foolishness in favor of more charitable Christian interpretations marked by an overriding sympathy for the victim of any act of violence. As we saw in Chapter 3, Phaedrus's fables also evinced this same sympathy for the victims of injustice who suffer at the hands of the rich and powerful. For Phaedrus, however, this was a largely secular problem,<sup>72</sup> while for Odo there is a Christian religious framework that pervades his entire project. Odo's interpretations thus sway between interpreting the wicked characters of the fables in secular terms (as bad people) or in theological terms (as the Devil himself). In the next (and final) chapter of my dissertation, I will consider another important medieval collection of fables which also belongs to this Christian framework of interpretation: the *Esopo toscano*, a collection of fables in prose, written in Italian about one hundred years after Odo. Like Odo's collection of fables, the *Esopo toscano* often employs allegorical methods of interpretation that are at odds with the Aesopic tradition. At the same time, the author of the *Esopo*

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<sup>71</sup> This paradoxical assessment also applies to Phaedrus, as discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>72</sup> Although in some poems the force of religion (even *Religio* herself) would intervene to restore order; for a discussion of *Religio* chastising a thief, see Phaedrus 4.11 = Perry 513.

*toscano* revels in the telling of his stories, luxuriating in the freedom of vernacular prose.

With these Italian tales we will finally come close to something like the transcription of the actual telling of a story in writing, a much stronger echo of the sheer joy of storytelling that we know must have sustained these stories over the centuries, above and beyond the written tradition of the tales.

## CHAPTER 5

### *Esopo toscano* and the Pleasure of the Story

#### Part One. The *Esopo toscano*: Story and Allegory

While I have tried to emphasize the *plot* of the Aesopic fable as its central constituent element (with the moral being the verbal culmination of the plot), I have not said much about the telling of the story, that is, the characterization of the actors in the story and the setting in which the story unfolds. My reason for emphasizing the plot and the moral over what I will call here the "characters" is not arbitrary: I hope to have demonstrated that the way in which this genre conveys a meaning to its audience is through the plot and the moral of the story, rather than through a detailed description of the characters, the setting, etc. The simple structure of the plot and the pointedness of the moral makes the Aesopic fable a brief genre, ideally suited to oral performance, almost the verbal equivalent of wagging your finger at someone, as if to say "how could you have been so stupid?" (or a verbal dope-slap, as if to say "how could I have been so stupid?"). Indeed, Aesopic fables can become so abbreviated that they turn into proverbs or maxims. Some of the proverbs discussed in Chapter 1 clearly fall into this category: you do not need a full-blown story about a fisherman and a jellyfish to appreciate both the plot and the moral that are encapsulated in the proverb *piscator ictus sapit*. In other cases, a proverb does not encapsulate the story, but instead alludes to it by means of a single, vivid detail. For example, it is enough to say the phrase "sour grapes" and the whole story of the fox and the grapes is invoked, at least for the listener who is familiar

with the story.<sup>1</sup> In everyday oral contexts the Aesopic fable exists in order to be repeated and reduced to a bare minimum of detail. In its literary form, however, the Aesopic fable can be elaborated in greater detail, although even early poets such as Babrius and Phaedrus tended to keep their poems short, simulating the brevity which would be more characteristic of the fable as an oral performance.

As further confirmation of the inherent brevity of this genre, it is interesting to note the comparative rarity with which "tripartite" forms of expansion, so characteristic of folktales, appear in Aesopic fables. It is rather uncommon for an Aesopic fable to have a tripartite structure. So far, we have looked at only one fable with a markedly tripartite structure: the dialogue between the wolf and the lamb at the stream. In Phaedrus's version of the story,<sup>2</sup> the wolf makes three verbal assaults on the lamb: first he accuses the lamb of muddying the water, then he accuses the lamb of having insulted him six months previous, then he accuses the lamb's father of having committed the crime for which the lamb himself must pay. In Babrius's version,<sup>3</sup> the plot is elaborated in three stages, but the contents of those stages differ from Phaedrus's version: first, the wolf accuses the lamb of having insulted him a year ago; then the wolf accuses him of eating grass from the wolf's field; and finally the wolf accuses the lamb of drinking from the wolf's fountain, whereupon the wolf proceeds to eat him. This tripartite development contributes greatly to the stylistic impression made by the story, but this feature is not

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<sup>1</sup> On proverbial literacy and fables, see Carnes's study of "sour grapes" and "the lion's share" (1988).

<sup>2</sup> Phaedrus 1.1 = Perry 155, cited on p. 166, 229.

<sup>3</sup> Babrius 89 = Perry 155, cited on p. 172.

required by the fable genre itself. In other words, the three stages of the story's development found in Phaedrus and Babrius are not required for the essential plot and moral of the underlying fable, and it is thus not surprising to find a reduced form of this same story without the tripartite structure in Odo of Cheriton's telling of the story:<sup>4</sup>

A wolf and a lamb came to drink from the same stream, and the wolf said: Why are you muddying my water? And the lamb said: I'm not muddying the water, because you are upstream from me, and water flows down from you to me. And the wolf said: Accursed creature, do you contradict me, are you so bold as that? And straightaway he ate the lamb.

As Odo's reduced version of the story shows, the encounter between the wolf and the lamb can be expressed in a single motif: the dispute over who is drinking upstream and who is drinking downstream. Phaedrus and Babrius have the wolf make three verbal assaults on the lamb, but in this case Odo finds one assault sufficient to make a fable. This core motif creates all the tension between the wolf and the lamb that is needed to bring the story to its conclusion. This is not to say that Odo is averse to telling a fully developed story, of course, as we saw in several of the examples in the previous chapter. Odo's story of the duke-bird who says "cluck!" is a perfect example of the story-teller's art, in which the frequent repetition of the silly sound made by the bird provides much amusement for the story's audience, even though the repetition itself is not a required aspect of the plot or moral of the story.<sup>5</sup>

With these references to the story-teller's art, I do not mean simply a literary presentation of the story. In the poetic forms of the fable as represented by Phaedrus,

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<sup>4</sup> Odo 24 = Perry 155, cited on p. 229.

<sup>5</sup> Odo 2 = Perry 588.



Babrius, and Avianus, there are a number of conventions that actually work against what I am calling here the story-teller's art. These highly crafted literary poems are not only short, but condensed and intricate, and at their best are much influenced by the traditions of epigrammatic poetry. As such, "Aesopic poetry" is often reduced to an epigram-like form which is marked by elaborate, even convoluted word order (it is really not until LaFontaine that there is revolution in the form of Aesopic poetry, counter-acting the impulse to be epigrammatic). In these condensed forms (the folklore condensation of the proverb or the literary condensation of the epigram), the Aesopic fable exemplifies tremendous verbal wit and ingenuity, but this is different from the sort of elaboration that I have in mind when I refer to the story-teller's art: that is, the elaboration of the story for its own sake, with abundant comic repetition which is hyperbolic in content, but also hyperbolic in form, consisting of lengthy dialogues back-and-forth between the antagonists that do not necessarily advance the plot or moral of the story. This kind of detail, independent of the fable's plot or moral, is not regularly a feature of the Aesopic fable either in its oral form or in its classical literary versions.<sup>6</sup>

In the fourteenth-century *Esopo toscano*,<sup>7</sup> however, we finally meet with a

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<sup>6</sup> In this division between the plot, characters, and moral of the story, I am basically following Permiakov's analysis of verbal production in his "theory of the cliché" (1968), which depends on three planes of expression: Permiakov's "narrative composition" is what I would call the plot of the fable, and his "logico-semiotic" plane is what I would call the moral. The characters and all the other realia of the story are what Permiakov would call the "image-object" plane, which in traditional Aesopic fables is of considerably reduced importance compared to the other two planes.

<sup>7</sup> The author is anonymous: *Questo libro si chiama Esopo volgarizzato per uno da Siena*. For a discussion, see Boldrini (1994: 27-28). Based on internal evidence in the fables themselves, Boldrini thinks the author was probably a lay member of the

collection of stories that consistently exemplify a "story-telling" approach to the fables, meant to delight and amuse the audience with the story-teller's art. These prose versions<sup>8</sup> of the story make no pretense to any particular literary form: with their simple and repetitive paratactic structures (and the wolf said this... and then the lamb said ... and then the wolf said...), the stories of the *Esopo toscano* come close to being a kind of oral performance in writing.<sup>9</sup> Yet unlike the prose versions of the stories in Odo's fables, the fables of the *Esopo toscano* dwell with unprecedented delight on the characters of the story, and the motivations of the characters for acting as they do.<sup>10</sup> For example, instead of just starting with the premise that there is a war going on between the beasts and the birds, the *Esopo toscano* explains in great detail the events leading up to this war; when the mouse is on a journey and needs the frog's help to cross the river, the *Esopo toscano* explains that the mouse has committed all sorts of sins which he is expiating by

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Dominican order, as does Branca (1994: 11-12).

<sup>8</sup> Although Boldrini identifies some elegant rhyming "jingles" in the prose (see 1994: 27), such as the concluding lines of the interpretation of *Esopo toscano* 54 (= Perry 346), the story of the wolf and the dog: *e per lo lupo ciascuno poverello, che non cura di pane a burattello*.

<sup>9</sup> On oral composition and the written form see comments of Nagy throughout *Pindar's Homer* (1990), and the extremely useful overview by Walter Ong in *Orality and Literacy* (1982).

<sup>10</sup> Odo's only real foray into the development of his characters is in his appropriation of Reynard the fox and other characters from the beast epic tradition, as discussed in Chapter 4. The later European beast epics revolving around Reynard the fox provide the fullest possible development of the traditional Aesopic animals as actual "characters," equipped with names and life histories which they carry from one episode to another. Even the *Esopo toscano* does not develop the characters of its animals so fully: the fox from one story of the *Esopo toscano* is not the "same" fox as found in any other story in the collection.

going on a pilgrimage; in telling the story of the man who found a snake frozen in the snow, the *Esopo toscano* tells us that the man was walking around on that snowy day because he had gone to chop wood for his fire.<sup>11</sup>

What makes this elaboration of character even more interesting is that the *Esopo toscano* is a translation of some of the most epigrammatic Aesopic poetry ever written: Walter of England's Latin verse fables. These elegant and witty poems, written in elegiac couplets, are excellent examples of verbal ingenuity, but they give almost no attention to character development. Walter's fables thus exemplify the art of the poet, but not that of the story-teller, creating a marked contrast between Walter's Latin originals and their Italian "translations" in the *Esopo toscano*. This Latin collection dates to the late twelfth century, making Walter a slightly older contemporary of Odo of Cheriton. Walter's poems represent one of the most important streams of the medieval Romulus tradition of Aesopic fables.<sup>12</sup> There are 63 fables in the collection, although the last few poems cannot be attributed to Walter with certainty,<sup>13</sup> and the popularity of

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<sup>11</sup> The story of the mouse and the frog is *Esopo toscano* 3 = Perry 384; the story of the man and the frozen snake is *Esopo toscano* 10 = Perry 176.

<sup>12</sup> The Romulus tradition is based on a late antique prose paraphrase of Phaedrus's fables derived from a Phaedrus manuscript that was more complete than any of the manuscripts of Phaedrus which have reached us. Of the 60 fables that should certainly be included in Walter's collection, 58 are from the Romulus tradition, with the addition of two folktales that are not, properly speaking, Aesopic fables: *De iudeo et pincerna* and *De cive et equite*. For a discussion, see Boldrini (1994: 19-20).

<sup>13</sup> Although there is some uncertainty as to the authorship of a few poems at the end of the collection. Branca's edition of the *Esopo toscano*, for example, does not contain the story of the merchant, his wife, and the "snow child," although Boldrini does include the story in his edition of the *Esopo toscano*.

the work is suggested by the quantity of extant manuscripts, which number over 130, in addition to many printed editions of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>14</sup> Walter was actually a well-known personage in his day, a chaplain to Henry II who was then sent to Sicily to be the tutor of William the Young (who had been betrothed to Henry's daughter). While in Sicily, Walter was named Archbishop of Palermo and participated in the building of the Palermo cathedral. It is not known exactly when Walter composed his Latin fables or for what purpose,<sup>15</sup> although Walter did compose pedagogical materials, *Pro latinae linguae exercitiis*, for his young charge; it seems quite possible that the Aesopic fables may have been part of that Latin curriculum.<sup>16</sup> There are no promythia, but each poem is equipped with an epimythium, precisely one couplet in length. Walter's morals are basically "Aesopic" in tone, without the Christian frame of reference which we saw in Odo's fables and which we will find again in the *Esopo toscano*.

The *Esopo toscano*'s prose versions of Walter's poems can only be called

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<sup>14</sup> For a discussion, see Boldrini (1994: 8-9). The standard modern edition is that of Hervieux, published in vol. II along with the other Romulus editions. Hervieux also includes other materials relevant to the different redactions of Walter.

<sup>15</sup> Not all authorities are agreed that Walter is the author of the fables; for a discussion, see Boldrini (1994: 8). The fables also circulated anonymously, or attributed to an anonymous writer of "Névelet" (again, see Boldrini, 1994: 8).

<sup>16</sup> Whether Walter originally intended the fables as school exercises, it is certainly true that they came to be used as such; for a discussion, see Boldrini (1994: 12). Yet the fables may also have had an illustrious literary influence. Boldrini argues, for example, that this is the Aesopic collection which Dante knew, and which is alluded to in canto 23 of the *Inferno*, lines 4 ff.: *volt'era in su la favola d'Isopo / lo mio pensier per la presente rissa, / dov'ei parlò della rana e del topo*.

"translations" in the loosest possible sense. Where Walter uses dense poetic word order, the *Esopo toscano* is a free-flowing, almost completely paratactic "ramble" in which the events of each fable are spun out at great length, with numerous details elaborating the development of the characters: there are explanations of why the characters act as they do, detailed physical descriptions of the characters, and soliloquies in which the characters ponder their circumstances and deliberate about their fate. After the *Esopo toscano* finishes its version of the story (which is regularly much more extensive and elaborate than the version in Walter), there then follows a quite close translation of Walter's epimythium to the story, usually introduced by a formulaic phrase, such as *dice l'autore*, "the author (i.e. Walter) says" or *l'autore ci ammaestra*, "the author instructs us." Yet after translating the concluding epimythium of Walter's poem, our Italian author proceeds to an explicitly Christian interpretation of the fable, according to a more or less allegorical procedure, in which the fable is interpreted according to two frames of reference. First is the "spiritual" interpretation, in which the story is seen as a symbolic expression of Christian theological doctrine or the problems confronted by monks and other *religiosi*. This spiritual interpretation is then followed by a "secular" interpretation, in which the story is seen as a symbolic expression of civic or economic life, often involving the problems faced by merchants and their clients. In the same way that Walter's epimythium is regularly introduced by a formulaic expression, these allegorical Christian interpretations are also introduced by fixed formulas such as *spiritualmente s'intende*, "in spiritual terms, what is meant..." (e.g., *spiritualmente s'intende per lo gallo colui che ha rispetto solamente alle cose terrene*, "in spiritual

terms, what is meant by the rooster is someone who regards only earthly things") and *temporalmente s'intende*, "in secular terms, what is meant..." (e.g., *temporalmente s'intende per lo gallo ciascun uomo che abbandona, per poco conoscere, il grande frutto della scienza*, "in temporal terms, what is meant by the rooster is each person who because of his limited understanding rejects the great benefits of knowledge"). Thus, the *Esopo toscano* is organized according to a regular style of presentation, marked by rigid rhetorical and stylistic formulas, as we have seen already: the Aesopic fable is a genre strongly governed by formulaic expressions and patterns of all sorts, even if those formulas vary from book to book. Yet at the same time that the author of the *Esopo toscano* organizes his book with scrupulous rigor, he also shows a fantastic ingenuity in improvising the details of the plots that he recounts, freely developing the characters as real "personalities" in the story, along with a kind of wild allegorical imagination that prompts spiritual and secular applications for each of the fables. In this chapter, I will analyze both the details of the *Esopo toscano*'s plots and its emphatically Christian allegorical style, beginning with the story of the battle between the beasts and the birds, a fable whose plot and allegorical interpretation exemplify both aspects of the *Esopo toscano*'s innovative approach to the Aesopic tradition.

### ***The Eagle Commits "Avultury" with the Kite***

Although my focus in this chapter will be on the *Esopo toscano* rather than on Walter's poems per se, I will regularly begin with Walter's poem, in order to show what a remarkable transformation takes place between the Latin "original" and the Italian

version found in the *Esopo toscano*. This is, in fact, our first opportunity to look at the specific transformation of one version of a fable into another. This kind of comparative analysis is not possible in the case of Phaedrus's poems, for example, because it is not clear what materials Phaedrus took as his starting point. In the case of the early Romulus tradition, it is possible to compare the prose paraphrases with Phaedrus's poems, but the prose paraphrasers do not introduce extensive innovations, providing little material for comparative analysis. Of course, as the Romulus tradition evolves, there are some very distinctive productions that emerge, yet because the Romulus tradition is itself so chaotic, we cannot be sure what versions served as the "originals" for the later Romulus authors such as Walter and his anonymous fellows. The *Esopo toscano*, however, is a special case: there is no doubt that we are dealing here with Italian prose transformations of Walter's Latin poems, and at many points the Italian author is clearly translating Walter word-for-word. Yet at the same time, the Italian author makes many innovative changes to the Latin originals, and by comparing the Italian fables to the Latin poems it is possible to see very clearly what contributions our Italian author is making to the centuries-old Aesopic tradition, as exemplified by Walter's Latin version of the story:<sup>17</sup>

Quadrupedes pugnant avibus, victoria nutat;  
 Spes onerata metu vexat utrumque gregem.  
 Linqvit aves que sumit avis de vespere nomen,  
 Nec timet oppositi castra iuvare chori.  
 Armat aves aquile virtus, et viribus implet  
 Et monitu; torpet altera turba metu.  
 Amplexatur aves ulnis victoria letis;

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<sup>17</sup> Walter 44 = Perry 566. Here, as elsewhere in this chapter, the texts of Walter's poems and the English translation of the Italian fable both follow Boldrini's edition of the *Esopo toscano* (1994), and I have also followed Boldrini's numeration.

Pro titulo penam transfuga sumit avis:  
Vellere nuda suo, pro plumis vellera vestit  
Edictumque subit ne nisi nocte volet.  
Non bonus est civis qui prefert civibus hostem:  
Utiliter servit nemo duobus eris.

The beasts [*quadrupedes*] contend with the birds, the victory [*victoria*] is uncertain; hope mixed with fear [*spes onerata metu*] weighs upon both sides. the bird who takes its name from the night-time [*vespertilio* = bat, *avis de vespere nomen*] abandoned the side of the birds and was not afraid to aid the camps of the enemy group. the eagle's virtue [*armat aves aquile virtus*] fortifies the birds, and fills them with strength and encouragement [*viribus implet et monitu*]; the opposing crowd grows sluggish with fear [*torpet metu*]. Victory happily embraces the birds [*amplexatur aves ulnis victoria letis*], and the bat is stripped of its plumage and is dressed in fur instead of feathers [*vellere nuda suo, pro plumis vellera vestit*] and is placed under orders to fly about only at night [*ne nisi nocte volet*]. The citizen who places the enemy before his fellow citizens is not a good citizen; no one can serve two masters well.

This artful poem exemplifies many of Walter's stylistic tendencies, so different from what we will find in the *Esopo toscano*. Walter does not even name the bat in the poem, but instead leaves it up to the reader to guess the answer to this aetiological riddle: the *avis de vespere nomen* is the bat, *vespertilio*.<sup>18</sup> There is an emphasis on abstract rather than concrete vocabulary (*victoria, spes, metus, virtus, vires, monitus*) and there are poetic circumlocutions of various sorts (*quadrupedes* to name the beasts, and the bird's victory described as *amplexatur aves ulnis victoria letis*). Walter uses all sorts of poetic wordplay, especially assonance (e.g, *armat aves aquile virtus* and *ne nisi nocte volet*). Typically there is no endomythium (Walter is not especially interested in the dialogic aspect of the fables), but there is regularly an epimythium in the final couplet, or rather

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<sup>18</sup> Ovid uses the same trick in his *Metamorphoses* when he too provides an aetiology of the bat but does not name the creature as he describes the metamorphosis of the daughters of Minyas (4.414-415): *tectaue, non silvas celebrant lucemque perosae nocte volant seroque tenent a vespere nomen*.



two epimythia, since it is often the case that each line of the couplet provides a separate expression of the moral: *non bonus est civis qui prefert civibus hostem*, "the citizen who places the enemy before his fellow citizens is not a good citizen," and *utiliter servit nemo duobus eris* "no one can serve two masters well."

If we turn now to the *Esopo toscano* version of the story, it is not even clear at first that we are dealing with a version of Walter's poem. Whereas Walter devotes only a single couplet to introducing the scenario of the war between the beasts and the birds, with the bat appearing in the third line of the poem, the author of the *Esopo toscano* takes great delight in describing the scandalous circumstances which marked the beginning of this war, and the bat does not even appear until we are well into the story:<sup>19</sup>

*Concerning the battle of the beasts with the birds.*<sup>20</sup> In a matter of great urgency, the lion had entrusted the rabbit with some letters to deliver, but the falcon had caught him, and had taken the letters away from him and then brought the letters to the eagle, and in those letters were things that caused much embarrassment for the eagle; to wit, that she had been committing "avultury" with the kite [*trovata in avolterio col nibbio*]. The eagle saw that the lion was planning her public humiliation, so she sent an emissary to the lion, declaring their enmity, stating that the lion would not wear the crown any longer since he had been engaged in such a mad plot. And when the lion heard this unpleasant declaration from the eagle, he answered deceitfully: "I intend to take counsel with my parliament this month, and to assemble all my subjects in the Maremma on the plain of Boccheggiano,<sup>21</sup> and if the eagle wants to avenge the insult, she can find me there. And so that she might believe my words, I want the ambassadors to bring her this lance and my glove." The lion thus threw down the

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<sup>19</sup> *Esopo toscano* 44 = Perry 566 (Italian text cited at p. 285).

<sup>20</sup> The Italian titles are as found in a fifteenth-century codex. For a discussion of this codex and its illustrations, see Boldrini (1994: 28-29).

<sup>21</sup> There are various Tuscan geographical indications throughout the book; Boccheggiano is near Grosseto.

gauntlet.<sup>22</sup> War was then declared between the birds and the beasts, and each side readied itself and armed itself with all the prerequisites of battle, and they came together in the field. When the bat saw that the lines were drawn up and that there were more beasts than birds, he seized a huge lance and took up his post in the line of the beasts, joining the ranks of the mice. Now the eagle had wisely [*savia*] and carefully ordered the ranks, and so had the lion, and once the battle lines were drawn the fight began, and it lasted for the larger part of the day. In the battle the birds won and brought defeat to the beasts. When the bat saw that victory had gone to the birds, he went over to the birds, and stood amongst them looking somewhat embarrassed [*quasi mezzo svergognato*]. Then the eagle had him seized and hanged up by his feet, and had him beaten from head to toe. Then they let him down, and in the presence of all the other animals the eagle gave him the following command (and it was thus recorded by the kite): never by day shall the bat be found in any respectable place; and they beat the bat with enormous sticks, and he was utterly broken to bits.

In all the versions of Aesop's fables that we have considered so far, even including LaFontaine's version of the swan and the cook,<sup>23</sup> we have not seen any story as "story-ful" as this one. Whereas the Aesopic fable usually reduces the roster of characters to a bare minimum, the *Esopo toscano* revels in all the potential characters who can be introduced and the intrigues that bring them together: the lion-king, with his rabbit-messenger, along with the eagle-queen,<sup>24</sup> her kite-secretary (and lover!), as well as her falcon-spy. Speeches are frequent in the *Esopo toscano*, as here when the lion makes his

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<sup>22</sup> The animals sometimes possess these human accoutrements in the *Esopo*, which is not typical of traditional Aesopic fables. Compare the lion pretending to be a doctor in *Esopo toscano* 42 (= Perry 392): *e con un cappuccio di vaio in capo e un paio di guanti in mano, e gli speroni in piede*. In *Esopo toscano* 3 (= Perry 384), the frog is dressed as a sailor in order to fool the mouse; the frog in *Esopo toscano* 40 (= Perry 376) is also dressed up; in *Esopo toscano* 46 (= Perry 568) the fox grows jealous when he sees the well-dressed wolf.

<sup>23</sup> For LaFontaine's fable, see p. 54.

<sup>24</sup> In English it is impossibly difficult to keep up with the shifting genders of animal names in Greek, Latin, Italian, and other gendered languages.

speech to the eagle's ambassadors. As opposed to the abstract vocabulary in Walter's poem, there is an abundance of physical detail, such as the letters intercepted by the falcon, the glove thrown down by the lion, and the lance seized by the bat as he rushes into war. Whereas Walter emphasized the stripping of the bat's feathers in his aetiological poem, the *Esopo toscano* describes instead a violent beating: *fu tormentato con grandissimi bastoni, e tutto fu fracassato*, "they beat the bat with enormous sticks, and he was utterly broken to bits."<sup>25</sup> It seems, in fact, that the *Esopo toscano* is more interested in explaining why the bat hangs upside down than in explaining its lack of feathers, given the unexpected emphasis on the way that the birds hang the bat up by his feet before they begin to cudgel him: *allora l'aquila lo fece pigliare ed impiccare per li piedi, e tutto quanto lo fece percussare*, "then the eagle had him seized and hanged up by his feet, and had him beaten from head to toe." Since the bat is called *pipistrello* in Italian, the *Esopo toscano* cannot make the same word play on *vesper-vespertilio* as in Walter's poem, but it is clearly stated that part of the bat's punishment is that he will only be allowed to fly around at night. Moreover, the author tells us that this aetiological punishment "was written out by the kite's hands," *questo si è scritto per le mani del nibbio*. The incongruous image of the kite writing something down with his "hands" is a precise physical detail which brings to this fable all the charm of the animal-king's court and all the physical incongruities of these highly anthropomorphic animals.

Yet when we turn to the interpretation of the story, it is no longer a matter of fun

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<sup>25</sup> Compare a similar beating of the donkey after trying to imitate the master's puppy-dog, *Esopo toscano* 17 = Perry 91: *e con molte percosse di bastoni forti e lunghi l'hanno levato d' addosso al signore e legato*.

and adventure in the court of the lion and the court of the eagle. Instead, the *Esopo toscano* interprets the story now in wildly allegorical terms, forcing the story to fit the opposition between body and soul<sup>26</sup> on which so much of Christian allegory depends:<sup>27</sup>

The author says that the one who puts the enemy ahead of his fellow citizens can never be a good citizen, and that no one can serve two masters well. In spiritual terms, the eagle is a symbol of the soul, which pays heed to celestial things [*l'anima, la quale attende all'alte cose del cielo*], and the lion is a symbol of the body, which consists of a vile substance from the earth [*il corpo, il quale è fatto della vile materia della terra*]. The battle is a symbol of the struggle which takes place between the soul and the body [*la contestazione, ch'è tra l'anima ed il corpo*]. The bat is a symbol of the greed which is felt at the sight of earthly things, and which afterwards repents when it sees their bad end. And in temporal terms, the beasts and the birds are symbols of the Guelfs and the Ghibellines. And the bat is a symbol of those who try to take the middle ground, saying and shouting, "Long live the winner!" Such people are not recognized by either side and are considered suspect.

As usual, the epimythium begins with a close translation of Walter's closing couplet:

"The author says that the one who puts the enemy ahead of his fellow citizens can never be a good citizen, and that no one can serve two masters well." The Latin *non bonus est civis qui prefert civibus hostem: / utiliter servit nemo duobus eris* becomes in Italian *non è giammai buon cittadino colui che pone innanzi il nimico a' cittadini, e che niuno può servire utilmente a due signori*, introduced by the formulaic allusion to Walter as the *autore*: *dice l'autore* (i.e. Walter), *che...* Following this translation of Walter's epimythium, the *Esopo toscano* then launches into an allegorical Christian interpretation of the fable, much in the style of Odo. Rather than offering a synthetic interpretation of

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<sup>26</sup> For these oppositions between body and soul, letter and spirit, heaven and earth, see the discussion of Odo's allegorical vocabulary in Chapter 4.

<sup>27</sup> *Esopo toscano* 44 = Perry 566 (Italian text cited at p. 285).

the plot as a whole, the allegorical approach proceeds through the story item by item, showing how each item corresponds to a hidden reality, either a hidden spiritual reality, or a hidden secular reality. In the spiritual allegory, the eagle is a symbol of the soul, the lion is a symbol of the body, and the bat is a symbol of "the greed which is felt at the sight of earthly things." It is an exquisitely elegant interpretation, although it seems far removed from the plot of the story itself. According to this interpretation the bat does not join the side of the animals out of pure expediency. Instead, this allegorical Christian bat joins the side of the animals because the animals are earthly (as opposed to the celestial, spiritual birds), and since the bat is a symbol of greed, of course greed will be attracted to earthly things.

The allegorical interpretation thus imposes a hierarchy which is not actually part of the underlying Aesopic fable. In the original story of the battle between the birds and the beasts, it does not matter which side wins or loses; the focus of the plot is on the bat's vacillation and his mistaken decision to switch sides. In the Christian interpretation, however, the birds are superior to the beasts, because celestial reality is superior to earthly goods. The fact that this queen of the birds is an adulterous eagle cannot be accommodated in the allegorical interpretation, of course, but this does not seem to bother the author of the *Esopo toscano* in any way whatsoever: he expands the plot of the story according to the rules of story-telling (so he invents a wonderful tale of intrigue in the animal courts), and he expands the moral of the story according to the rules of allegory, and specifically the rules of Christian allegory which relies heavily on an opposition between the kingdoms of heaven and earth, body and spirit, etc. In his secular

allegory of the story, the author of the *Esopo toscano* has recourse to a different set of oppositions: the battle between the beasts and the birds is no longer a symbol of the battle between body and soul, but between the Guelfs and the Ghibellines. This political interpretation sets the allegory of the story firmly in medieval Tuscany, in the same way that the geographical detail of the Maremma and Boccheggiano marks the setting of the story as Tuscan. As I argued in Chapter 2, this flexible way of moralizing the fables ensured their ability to pass from one cultural milieu to another: the epimythium provides a space in which a particular author of a fable (in this case, the anonymous author of the *Esopo toscano*) can take a traditional fable and inflect it according to his own cultural milieu. This fable of the bat in the battle of the birds and the beasts had been passed down in a continuous tradition for close to two thousand years before it reached the author of the *Esopo toscano*, who renewed the story, and made it especially his own, by applying the fable to the political events of his time and setting it in his own backyard.

### ***Cheese and Insults***

The story of this battle between the birds and the beasts suggests something of the *Esopo toscano*'s interest in lively dialogue, in the way that a fable can and should convey the verbal confrontations that accompany the physical conflicts of the plot. This dialogic quality is present to a greater or lesser extent throughout the Aesopic tradition, and is especially strong in a story like the fox and the crow and the cheese, which we have already seen in several different versions. The opening lines of Walter's version,

however, are not focused on dialogue but on an extravagant poetic wordplay, in which the fox is "bearing" his hunger, while the tree is "bearing" a crow on its branches who in turn is "bearing" a cheese in its mouth:<sup>28</sup>

Vulpe gerente famem, corvum gerit arbor et escam  
Ore gerens corvus, vulpe loquente, silet.  
"Corve, decore decens, cignum candore perequas;  
Si cantu placeas, plus ave quaque places."  
Credat avis picteque placent prelude lingue;  
Dum canit ut placeat, caseus ore cadit.  
Hoc fruitur vulpes, insurgunt tedia corvo;  
Asperat in medio damna dolore pudor.  
Fellitum patitur risum, quem mellit inanis  
Gloria; vera parit tedia falsus honor.

While the fox bore her hunger [*vulpe gerente famem*], the tree bore a crow [*corvum gerit arbor*] and the crow bore a piece of cheese in his mouth [*escam ore gerens corvus*] and said nothing as the fox addressed him. "Crow, radiating grace, you equal the swan in whiteness [*corve, decore decens, cignum candore perequas*], if only you were pleasing in song, you would be the most pleasing of all birds [*si cantu placeas, plus ave quaque places*]." The bird believes the fox, and the crow makes pleasant gestures with its features and then with its tongue but when it wants to please with its song, the cheese falls out of its mouth. The fox profits from that cheese, and sorrow washes over the crow; embarrassment [*pudor*] in the midst of grief worsens his loss. The person who finds empty fame [*inanis gloria*] sweet suffers from bitter ridicule [*fellitum patitur risum*]; false esteem [*falsus honor*] gives rise to true sorrow.

In the dialogue which then ensues, Walter's fox uses the same stylistic devices as Walter the poet: intricate assonance (*corve, decore decens, cignum candore perequas*) and elegant word order facilitated by the elegiac meter, especially the hemistichs of the second line of the couplet (*si cantu placeas, :: plus ave quaque places*). As often, Walter's vocabulary is highly abstract. Thus, while the epimythium of the poem invokes traditional Aesopic mockery, *risus*, there is only a kind of rhetorical laughter to be found

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<sup>28</sup> Walter 15 = Perry 124 (for Phaedrus's version, see p. 16).

in the poem, which is rife with the abstractions of *gloria*, *honor*, and *pudor*.

In the *Esopo toscano*, however, the climax of the story is marked by a wonderful outburst of Aesopic mockery. It is not enough that the fox gets the cheese; this tangible victory is accompanied by a hyperbolic verbal assault on the crow, a lengthy diatribe of insult and invective grounded in concrete, physical details:<sup>29</sup>

**Concerning the crow, the fox, and the cheese.** The crow had managed to find a piece of cheese, and had flown up with the cheese into a high tree, and was enjoying it immensely as he held it in his beak. Meanwhile, the fox by her good fortune stumbled upon the scene and she turned her eyes up to the crow and decided how she could manage to use her wiles to deprive the crow of such a delicacy. And placing herself at the foot of the tree, she looked up, and fixed her attention on the crow as if she had seen some kind of miraculous vision, and she loudly proclaimed as follows: "I have lived long in this world and have sought hither, thither and yon, and have seen all sorts of beasts and birds, endowed and blessed by nature with all manner of beauty but there is none who can compare with the bird I now see above my head, whose beauty makes me stop in my tracks, filling my soul with joy and delight." When the crow heard himself being praised in such highly laudatory terms, he began to toss his head this way and that and to shake his tail, and the fox thus saw that she had hit the target, the arrow of vainglory had penetrated the crow [*fedito colla saetta della vanagloria*]. The fox then added the following words of praise: "If only the sound of your song were as sweet to my ears as the sight of your beauty is pleasing to my soul, I would ask for no other food than to hear the song and gaze upon the sight of such a bird, who is whiter than the swan and any other such beautiful white bird." Since the crow enjoyed his own singing very much, he felt sure he could please the fox as well, so he began to sing and dropped the cheese. Then the fox took the cheese and launched these terrible insults [*grandi schernimenti*] at the crow: "For God's sake, shut up [*sta cheto per l'amor d'Iddio*]; your excruciating song is driving me out of my mind; get out of here, please, because something so ugly makes me lose my appetite: from the looks of you, I'd guess you're a baker or a tanner, a lump of coal or a bottle of ink or a pile of dirty laundry."<sup>30</sup> And

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<sup>29</sup> *Esopo toscano* 15 = Perry 124 (Italian text cited at p. 285).

<sup>30</sup> Modern English cannot match the list of professions in Italian -- *fornaio*, *carbonaio*, or *appanator di guao*, o *maestro d'inchiestro*, ovvero *coiaio* -- so I've substituted some of the professions with their objects. Unfortunately there is no way to convey the wonderful wordplay in which most of these professions end with the



when the crow saw that he was being honored with such unpleasant appellations and unwelcome praise, and that the fox's sweet talk had tricked him out of his cheese, he flew away with a light flap of his wings, much embarrassed [*svergognato*], and the fox sat down happily to eat her cheese.

The *Esopo toscano* revels in the tricks which the animals play on one another, such as the *grandi schernimenti*, the outrageous humiliations, which the fox launches at the crow.

The blasphemous invocation of God, *sta cheto per l'amor d'Iddio*, "shut up, for the love of God," would seem to violate the Christian framework in which the fables are situated but, as we have seen already, the rules for rambunctious storytelling are not necessarily consistent with the rules for pious allegory. Forms of the verb *schernire*, to mock, to jeer or sneer, occur throughout the fables of the *Esopo toscano*. In the fable of the frogs asking for a king, Jupiter makes fun of the frogs by sending them a log to be their king:<sup>31</sup> he treats the frogs with *ischernimento e risa*, with scorn and laughter.<sup>32</sup> In the story of the mountain that gave birth to a mouse, the mouse is ridiculous, *schernevole*.<sup>33</sup> When a once glorious horse is turned into a pack animal, he becomes

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distinctive sound of -aio.

<sup>31</sup> *Esopo toscano* 21 = Perry 44.

<sup>32</sup> Similarly, in *Esopo toscano* 20 (= Perry 39), the swallow warns the other birds about the dangers of birdlime, but they only make fun of her, *e avendo udito gli uccelli il savio sermone ed ammaestramento di madonna la rondine, ciascuno si metteva il capo sotto il mantello e schernivala*. It is the swallow who has the last laugh, of course, because it is the simple-minded birds who will be caught in the fowler's snares: *e vedendosi manifestamente schernire, disse: Io non voglio che la vostra semplicità mi meni insieme con voi a tanto danno*.

<sup>33</sup> *Esopo toscano* 25 = Perry 520. Phaedrus's version of this fable (4.24) seems likely to be his effort to transform what was simply a proverb into fable form, much like his attempt to make a fable based on the *onos luras*, the donkey and the lyre.

an object of ridicule for the donkey, who laughs and mocks him, *schernivalo*.<sup>34</sup> The story of the fox and the stork inviting one another to dinner emerges as a story of sneers and counter-sneers, insults and revenge: the fox wants to ridicule the stork, *schernire la cicogna*, and the stork plots in return another humiliation, *schernimento*, in order to avenge herself. In this case, it is the fox who is the ultimate loser; unlike the humiliated crow, the stork is finally vindicated, rejoicing in the humiliation of her enemy, who is ridiculed, *schernita*, and forced to go without her supper.<sup>35</sup>

Yet there is nothing funny about the *Esopo toscano*'s allegorical interpretation of the fox and the crow. In the plot of the story, the fox can revel in comic verbal inventiveness, but the allegory interprets the fox's delightful eloquence as the barren wind of vainglory, the *infruttuoso vento della vanagloria*.<sup>36</sup>

The author says that whoever finds pleasure in the sweetness of vainglory [lo infruttuoso vento della vanagloria] will suffer a bitter humiliation [un amaro schernimento], and that false praise gives rise to true chagrin. In spiritual terms, the crow is a symbol of monks who allow themselves to be conquered by the temptation of vainglory and rise up in their pride; and like the crow they lose their cheese, that is, that lose the fruits of their good work. The fox is a symbol of the barren wind of vainglory.

The *Esopo toscano*'s interpretation is strongly reminiscent of Odo's allegory.<sup>37</sup> For Odo, the crow's cheese was the cheese of the soul, *hoc est nutrimentum, unde anima*

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<sup>34</sup> *Esopo toscano* 43 = Perry 565. The donkey's insults actually reduce the poor horse to tears in the end: *vedendosi il cavallo così schernito, piangendo se n'è ito*.

<sup>35</sup> *Esopo toscano* 33 = Perry 426.

<sup>36</sup> *Esopo toscano* 15 = Perry 124 (Italian text cited at p. 285).

<sup>37</sup> Odo 70 = Perry 124.

*debet vivere*, while here the cheese is the cheese of good works, *come il corbo perdè il cacio, così perdono il frutto delle loro buone operazioni*, "like the crow they lose their cheese, that is, they lose the fruits of their good work." Yet there is also an important difference between the Christian allegory offered here, and the version in Odo. For Odo, the dangerous predatory fox was a symbol of the devil himself, *sed venit Diabolus et excitat illos ad opus vane glorie*, "but the Devil comes and tempts them to an act of vainglory." The author of the *Esopo toscano* does not go so far; his Christian allegorical interpretation of the story remains firmly anchored in the human world, in which the fox is a flatterer, not the devil incarnate.

### ***The Devil and the Church***

Yet even though the author of the *Esopo toscano* does not always apply the Christian allegory of diabolical temptation to his stories, he does occasionally detect the devil's work in the guise of an Aesopic fable. Indeed, even the usually secular Walter proceeds allegorically in his interpretation of the fable of the wolf and the human mask.

Here is Walter's version of the story:<sup>38</sup>

Dum legit arva lupus, reperit caput arte superbum;  
Hoc beat humanis ars pretiosa genis.  
Hoc lupus alterno voluit pede, verba resolvit:  
O sine voce genas, o sine mente caput!  
Fuscat et exstinguit cordis caligo nitorem  
Corporis: est animi solus in orbe nitor.

While the wolf is making his way through the fields, he finds a head, beautifully crafted; valuable craftsmanship has bestowed it with a human face. The wolf rolls

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<sup>38</sup> Walter 34 = Perry 27 (although the traditional version is about a fox, not a wolf).

it back and forth with his feet, and pronounces the following words: O face without voice, O head without a mind! The blemish of the heart obscures and extinguishes the gleam of the body [nitorem corporis]: the only true gleam is the gleam of the soul [animi nitor].

This fable poses a serious problem for the Aesopic tradition: if we conceive the Aesopic fable as poised between insult and instruction, the fable of the wolf and the human head/mask seems almost all insult, with very little instructive purpose. The lack of a didactic message troubles Walter, who resorts to an uncharacteristically arcane interpretation of the story: instead of recognizing that this little story is the sort of insult one might hurl at a beautiful but stupid person, Walter conceives it as a comment on the tension between inner and outer beauty, the typical allegorical opposition between body and soul, *corpus* and *animus*. The author of the *Esopo toscano* goes even farther, interpreting this little drama as a truly diabolical plot:<sup>39</sup>

***Concerning the wolf who found the head of a dead man.*** While walking at his pleasure through a field, the wolf found the head of a dead man which had fallen down from the man's effigy. He began to roll the head back and forth between his feet, and said as follows: "O head without a mind! O face without a voice!" And the wolf was deeply impressed and brought to mind the impermanence of worldly things. In spiritual terms, the wolf is a symbol of the enemy of the human race who at his pleasure seeks to bring about an end to mankind, and who is astounded at our fragility; and when he gets hold of us he rolls us back and forth from one foot to the other as we commit various kinds of sins. The head separated from the body is a symbol of the accursed sinner separated from the head of the holy Church and from its ruler who is Jesus Christ, and this separation happens because of various kinds of sin. In secular terms, the wolf is a symbol of bad men who spend their time and take their pleasure in bad deeds, and they are extremely happy whenever they can induce someone into such acts, and the separated head is a symbol of those who reject the rules and regulations of business, and instead undertake wicked contracts and treacherous works.

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<sup>39</sup> *Esopo toscano* 34 = Perry 27 (Italian text cited at p. 286).

There is an unprecedented and even bizarre slippage in the Italian adaptation of Walter's original: in every other fable in the collection, Walter's epimythium is carefully translated, and almost without exception introduced with a formulaic reference to the *autore* (*dice l'autore*, "the author says," *l'autore ci ammaestra*, "the author shows us," etc.). In this case, however, the Italian version is not a translation of Walter's epimythium, and instead this wolf himself is made to ponder and reflect upon what has happened to him: *meravigliasi fortemente ed arrescasi a memoria la poca stabilità del mondo*, "the wolf was deeply impressed and brought to mind the impermanence of worldly things." In Aesopic terms, it is a completely incongruous scene: the animal who is supposed to be mocking and making fun of the foolish mask (person) without any brains becomes a kind of Hamlet holding aloft a human skull and reflecting on the transitoriness of all things. In this case, the allegorical interpretation has made dramatic inroads into the story of the fable itself;<sup>40</sup> the wolf's words, the endomythium of the fable, should be enough to bring the fable to a close, but the author of the *Esopo toscano* instead has the wolf adopt an unexpected pose, similar to the pose that the author himself will adopt in his allegorical interpretation of the fable.

As the author proceeds through the details of the allegorical interpretation, the story becomes almost completely unrecognizable: the wolf is the devil, and the head

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<sup>40</sup> For a similar example of allegorical "creep," consider the fox's assault on the crow in *Esopo toscano* 15 (= Perry 124), when the fox realizes that the crow has been struck by the "arrow of vainglory" (*la voipe comprese che l' aveva fedito colla saetta della vanagloria*), thus anticipating the allegorical vocabulary that will appear in the epimythium of the story: *Dice l' autore, che colui che si diletta della dolcezza della vanagloria, sostiene un amaro schernimento.*

becomes a symbol of the sinner. The rhetorical logic is painfully faulty: the head separated from the body is a symbol of the accursed sinner separated from the head of the holy Church and from its ruler who is Jesus Christ. In other words, the head is not the head at all: the head is the Church and, more specifically, Jesus Christ himself, but we are obviously not meant to imagine the wolf-devil rolling the head-Christ back and forth between his paws. This interpretive technique might be best described as "free association allegory" in which one object leads to another object and to yet another object until some kind of Christian conclusion begins to emerge, despite the inconsistent approach by which the interpretation is achieved. The problem results from the allegorical need to explain the individual objects in the story one by one, which is by no means a requirement in traditional Aesopic morals. The wolf's words are already sufficient to constitute an Aesopic moral; indeed, the entire fable could be paraphrased as an Aesopic Wellerism: "So much beauty, so little brains!" said the wolf who found the actor's mask. For Aesop, this is moral enough: the only real sin in the world of Aesop, after all, is the sin of stupidity, and to call someone stupid already constitutes a kind of Aesopic moral. The author of the *Esopo toscano*, on the other hand, revels in the verbal ingenuity of insult only in the plot of his Aesopic fables. When it comes to the moralization of the story, he abandons the insults and invents instead a suitably Christian conclusion.

### ***The Legs of Penitence***

The story of the stag admiring his horns undergoes a similar sort of allegorical

treatment in the *Esopo toscano*, although there is no trace of allegory in Walter's version of the story:<sup>41</sup>

Fons nitet, argento similis. Sitis arida cervum  
Huc rapit; haurit aquas, se speculatur aquis.  
Hunc beat; hunc mulcet ramosae gloria frontis;  
Hunc premit, hunc ledit tibia macra pedum.  
Ecce canes, tonat ira canum; timet ille, timenti  
Fit fuga: culpati cruris adorant opem.  
Silve claustra subit, cornu retinente moratur:  
Crure neci raptum cornua longa necant.  
Spernere quod prosit et amare quod obsit ineptum est.  
Prodest quod fugimus et quod amamus obest.

The pond shines like silver. A dry thirst summons the stag to the pond; he drinks the water and looks at himself in the water. This pleases the stag; the glory of the branching antlers on his forehead delights him; the gaunt shins of his legs depress and offend him. All of a sudden, the dogs are here, with their resounding fury; the stag is afraid, and needs to run away: now he is grateful for the work of the shanks he had criticized. He reaches the edge of the woods, and is slowed down when his horns get tangled: the long horns bring death to the legs seized by death. It is foolish [*ineptum est*] to scorn what can be useful and to adore what can be a hindrance; what we flee is useful and what we love is a hindrance.

Walter's epimythium begins to suggest something of the traditional Aesopic focus on the fool and foolishness: the stag is a negative example of something that is *ineptum*, a reckless way of behaving that we ourselves should avoid (although Walter no longer has the wonderful endomythium that we saw in Phaedrus's version of the story: *nunc demum intelligo!*). The version of the *Esopo toscano* follows Walter's version quite closely, although the author cannot help letting the stag speak, as often in these stories where the animals are granted soliloquies or lengthy speeches. Even if the story does not have an endomythium in which the stag is allowed to pronounce the moral of the story, the author

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<sup>41</sup> Walter 47 = Perry 74 (for Phaedrus's version, see p. 28).

of the *Esopo toscano* allows the stag to speak a few words as he admires his reflection in the fountain:<sup>42</sup>

***Concerning the stag looking at himself in the fountain.*** While walking at his pleasure in the outdoors a stag grew very thirsty and thus sought out a fountain with lovely and clear water. Drinking this water, the stag looked at himself and took great delight in his reflection, which showed his branching horns, and he praised himself highly for having such beauty. But when he looked at his legs, they seemed to him thin and emaciated; and this caused him great pain and made him feel ashamed and he said: "I would rather not have legs at all if they must be so repulsive." Then all of a sudden the hunters arrived and would have captured the stag but he ran off towards the woods and when he entered among the trees with branches hanging down low his horns were entangled, and so the stag was caught, although he was begging his legs to carry him away from there. But the long horns prevented the legs from running and so the horns which the stag had considered to be useful and pleasurable were the cause of his death, while his legs, which he had considered repulsive and unsafe would have allowed him to stay alive.

In the moralization of the story, the author of the *Esopo toscano* begins with Walter's succinct analysis of the paradoxical plot: what we love defeats us, and we spurn what would save us from defeat. Yet this interpretation does not satisfy the allegorical impulse to deal with the story item by item: what do those horns symbolize, after all? and what about those skinny legs? These are the questions that the *Esopo toscano* sets out to answer in his allegorical appropriation of the story:<sup>43</sup>

The author says that it is a disgraceful thing to disparage what is useful and to love what is hazardous, with the result that we flee what is good for us, and we embrace what is dangerous. In spiritual terms, the stag is a symbol of every man of this world who finds his love and delight in the delicacies of the world, which are like the horns of the stag, and who flees the austerities of penitence, which are like the legs of the stag [*l'asprezza delle penitenzie, la quale è simigliante alle gambe*]; and just as the horns were the reason for the death of the stag

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<sup>42</sup> *Esopo toscano* 47 = Perry 74 (Italian text cited at p. 287).

<sup>43</sup> *Esopo toscano* 47 = Perry 74 (Italian text cited at p. 287).



because they impeded the running of his legs, so the beauties of the body and elegant living impede the legs of penitence [*le gambe della penitenzia*], not letting them serve their purpose of proceeding towards the eternal life. The fountain and the clear water are a symbol of the appearance of the things of this world. In secular terms the stag is every simple man [*ogni semplice uomo*] who abandons profitable and welcome work that is useful in favor of empty and fruitless pleasure. And the horns are a symbol of that empty pleasure and the legs are a symbol of useful work. The fountain is a symbol of vainglory.

The legs of penitence, *le gambe della penitenzia*: like Odo's use of the genitive gloss (the olive oil of charity, *pinguedinem caritatis*; the well of sin, *puteum culpe*, etc.),<sup>44</sup> the "legs of penitence" allow the author of the *Esopo toscano* to forcibly collocate the worlds of heaven and earth, body and spirit, *gambe* and *penitenzia*. This interpretation is then reinforced by the physical qualities of the legs themselves: the stag is disgusted by his legs because they are so thin, which symbolizes the physical harshness required by a penitent lifestyle: *l'asprezza delle penitenzie, la quale è simiglianta alle gambe*. Indeed, the inner logic of the allegorical equation sweeps on through the story, as the legs of penitence are attempting to bear us away into eternal life, in the same way that the stag seeks to save his life by running away from the hunter. A traditional Aesopic fable would never stop to analyze the legs of the stag: to interpret an Aesopic fable, you only need to know who the loser is (the stag), and the nature of the mistake that made him a loser (admiring his worst qualities, and scorning his best qualities). A Christian allegorical interpretation has far deeper aspirations: the divine message is hidden in every detail of the story, not merely in the plot and its dramatic outcome.

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<sup>44</sup> For these glosses in Odo, see Part One of Chapter 4.

### *The Axe of the Senses*

The most elaborate allegory to be found in the *Esopo toscano* is attached to the fable of the axe and the trees. As in the story of the stag and his "legs of penitence," Walter's version of the story does not suggest any sort of allegorical interpretation. Instead, Walter's moralization of the story is typically Aesopic, and even includes a self-castigating endomythium pronounced by the foolish trees:<sup>45</sup>

Quo teneatur eget nil ausa secare securis.  
Armet eam lucus, vir rogat; ille favet.  
Vir nemus impugnat lassans in cede securim:  
Arboris omne genus una ruina trahit.  
Lucus ait: "Pereo. Mihimet sum causa pericli,  
Me necat ex dono rustica dextra meo."  
Unde perire queas, hostem munire caveto:  
Qui dat quo pereat, quem iuvat hoste perit.

The axe dares not chop anything down while it is lacking a handle. The man asks the grove to arm his axe, and the grove agrees. The man attacks the woods, wearing out his axe as he chops the trees down. A single demise befalls the whole race of trees. The grove says: "So I perish [*pereo*]; I am the cause of my own destruction [*mihimet sum causa pericli*], the farmer's hand [*rustica dextra*] slays me with my own gift." Be careful not to arm your enemy with the means of your own undoing; it is right that the person who supplies the means of his own destruction perishes at the hands of his enemy [*hoste perit*].

Walter's eight line poem presents a perfect balance between the competing demands of the plot and the moral in the traditional Aesopic fable: four lines are devoted to the plot, and four lines are devoted to the moral. In the first line of the moral -- "the grove says: So I perish (*pereo*); I am the cause of my own destruction" -- we see how the endomythium both brings the plot of the story to a close (*pereo*) while preparing for the moralization that follows, identifying precisely which character is guilty of having made

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<sup>45</sup> Walter 53 = Perry 303.

a mistake (*mihimet sum causa pericli*).

The author of the *Esopo toscano* makes two important changes in his adaptation of Walter's straight-forward Aesopic fable: one change is on the level of plot and especially the characters involved in the plot, while the other change is on the level of interpretation. This version of the story actually features an axe that talks, rather than a man with an axe, and this shift in character also produces a shift in the interpretation as well:<sup>46</sup>

***About the axe that didn't have a handle, and the woods.*** Because the axe did not have a handle by which it could be held, it couldn't chop anything down. Since the axe had been deprived of all its power, it went humbly to the woods, and asked the woods if it would furnish her with a little stick, which wouldn't be any great loss to the woods although it would be a very welcome thing for the axe because without a handle the axe was not esteemed by men and was not able to carry out its appointed task. And listening to the prayers of the axe, the woods did not think about the consequences but only about the great usefulness and honor which the handle would bring to the axe, and so the woods acted in trust [*di buona fede*], not thinking about the serious danger that might ensue, and gave a handle to the axe. And once the axe was armed with the handle, it began to cut down and to attack the woods on every side. And when the woods saw this, it began to lament inwardly about the little favor it had done for the handle, saying: "I am the cause of my own death and destruction, and the right hand of the villain" is killing me with my own gift."

By replacing the farmer and his axe with a talking axe that goes off to the woods all by itself to beg for a handle, the author of the *Esopo toscano* has created an altogether charming story. The axe is not merely an axe that can talk, but it is an axe with feelings,

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<sup>46</sup> *Esopo toscano* 53 = Perry 303 (Italian text cited at p. 287).

<sup>47</sup> In the Italian text, *villano* already has many negative connotations, but it can still refer to a farmer or person living in the countryside, equivalent to the *rusticus* of Walter's version. For example, in *Esopo toscano* 9 (= Perry 480), the one dog insults the other with the words -- *villaneggiolla di villane parole* -- but in the next story, *Esopo toscano* 10 (= Perry 176), a good-hearted farmer, *villano*, rescues a snake from the snow.

whose lack of a handle prevents it from succeeding in life: "because the axe did not have a handle by which it could be held, it couldn't chop anything down." The woods listen to the prayers of the axe, and offer it a bit of wood for a handle, which becomes a weapon turned against the trees, as the trees themselves recognize in the self-castigating endomythium, translating Walter almost word for word: *Io solo mi sono cagione di tanto pericolo e morte; e la mano diritta del villano mi uccide per lo mio dono*, "I am the cause of my own death and destruction, and the right hand of the villain is killing me with my own gift."

Yet while the author of the *Esopo toscano* is willing to translate Walter's endomythium and epimythium into Italian, the temptation to translate the story into allegorical terms is irresistible. The axe which was exploited as a full-blown, speaking character in the plot of the fable also becomes the focus in the allegory, where the axe's need for a handle (a hand-le for the hand, a *manico* for the *mano*) allows the author to impose a corporeal allegory on the story's plot:<sup>48</sup>

The author shows in this fable that each person must be on guard against supplying the enemy with arms that could do harm to himself; the person who supplies the thing which causes harm to himself is undone justifiably. In spiritual terms, we can understand the axe as the five bodily senses, which can be rendered powerless and incapable of harming the soul if they are ruled by discerning temperance. But when they follow their appetites, that is, when the throat is filled with abundant and sweet-tasting foods, and the feet go to disreputable places, and the hands touch things which are not allowed, and the tongue speaks in vain, and the ears listen to fruitless matters, and the eyes see and look at things which are forbidden, then with all their power they rise up in pride, and they deprive the soul of its virtues, and we can then say that a handle is given to the axe when we indulge the wanton proddings of our appetites, and act on them. The wood symbolizes the soul [*per lo bosco possiamo intendere essa anima*].

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<sup>48</sup> *Esopo toscano* 53 = Perry 303 (Italian text cited at p. 287).

In order to understand the Christian meaning of this story, the author pursues the familiar opposition between body and soul, between the axe and the woods. Apparently the five bodily senses must be something like the five fingers of the hand that are able to seize the axe if it is given a handle. Yet we need not worry too much about the details, since this allegory is clearly following the sort of "free-association" style that we saw earlier in the story of the head separated from the body. In this case, something suggests a connection between the axe and the five bodily senses (perhaps the five fingers of the hand, perhaps something else), and the author immediately moves on from the five bodily senses to the sensual parts of the body, which happen to number six rather than five (throat, feet, hands, tongue, ears, and eyes - but who's counting?). Yet when the author moves from this corporeal side of the equation to the spiritual side, he has strangely little to say: the wood is a symbol of the soul, *per lo bosco possiamo intendere essa anima*. When faced with a similar problem, Odo attempted to find an allegorical connection between the physical symbol and its hidden meaning: the trees are monks, *homines silvestres*, wood-y men, because monks do not live in the city, but in the countryside, where there are woods and trees. In this case, the author of the *Esopo toscano* does not attempt to describe any essential connection between the woods and the soul. It is a rather intractable situation, even given complete allegorical license: perhaps our author might have suggested that the woods could be a soul because birds live there in the trees. In any case, the author can always proceed according to the logic (free associational logic) which has linked the axe to the bodily senses: if the axe is a symbol of the bodily appetites, and if the axe destroys the woods, then the woods must be something that can

be destroyed by the body's appetites, which must be: the soul. It is a slippery logic, but hard to escape, once the chain of associations is unleashed.

In this case, however, the chain of associations is brought abruptly to a close, and the author then provides the secular interpretation, which is quite different from the spiritual allegory. In most cases, there is not a radical difference between the spiritual and secular allegories: the spiritual allegory explains the nature of the sin, and the secular allegory usually repeats the same story again, but with regard to secular sinners (the wolf with the human head, for example, is the devil in spiritual terms, and is a bad man who leads others to commit sinful acts in secular terms). In this case, however, a completely different sort of allegorical picture is imagined in the secular interpretation. Whereas the spiritual interpretation was based on the image of a struggle between the body and the soul, the secular interpretation tells a completely new story about the adventures of two gamblers:<sup>49</sup>

In secular terms, the woods and the axe are two gamblers, one of whom has lost everything he owns to the other; and then when the loser begs the winner to loan him some money he then uses that money to win back everything the winner had acquired.

This interpretation is much closer to the Greek prose Aesopic tradition than to the usual Christian allegory. We can compare, for example, the unexpected appearance of gamblers in the epimythium to the fable of the axe and the woods with the unexpected appearance of soldiers and generals in the allegory of the belly and the members in the

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<sup>49</sup> *Esopo toscano* 53 = Perry 303 (Italian text cited at p. 287).

Greek prose tradition:<sup>50</sup>

Koilia kai podes peri dunameôs êrizon. par' hekasta de tôn podôn legontôn hoti tosouton proekhousi têi iskui hôs kai autên tên gastera bastazein, ekeinê apekrinato "all', ô houtoi, ean mê egô trophên proslabômai, ouden humeis bastazein dunasthe." Houtô kai epi tôn strateumatôn mêden esti to polu plêthos, ean mê hoi stratêgoi arista phronôsin.

The stomach and the feet were arguing about their strength, and when the feet kept on insisting that they were so much more powerful that they even carried the stomach around, the stomach replied: "Say what you will, but if I didn't get any food, you wouldn't have the strength to carry anything around." The same is true of armies: a great number means nothing if the generals do not use their wits well.

The same can be said of the sudden appearance of politicians in the epimythium appended to the fable of the hyenas:<sup>51</sup>

Tas huainas phasi par' eniauton allattein tên phusin kai pote men arrenas ginesthai, pote de thêleias. kai dê pote arsên huaina thêleiai para phusin dietethê. hê de hupotukhousa ephê "all, ô houtos, houtô tauta pratte hôs eggus ta auta peisomenos." Pros arkhontas logothetountas tous hup' autous kai palin ek tou sumbebêkotos hup' ekeinôn logothetoumenous.

They say that hyenas change their nature annually and are sometimes male and sometimes female. In fact, a male hyena was unnaturally attracted towards a female hyena, and she said to him, "Go ahead, my dear, but remember that whatever you do now, you will soon have done to you." For elected officials who call those under them to account and later, as it turns out, are called to account by them.

With these Greek examples, we can see that in some ways the interpretive procedures that Odo and the *Esopo toscano* apply to the fables are not wholly alien to the Aesopic tradition. While it is true that the specific techniques of allegorical elaboration are not a usual feature of Aesopic fables, the fact that the Aesopic fable is an exemplum means

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<sup>50</sup> Perry 130, cited earlier on p. 101.

<sup>51</sup> Perry 243, cited earlier on p. 57.

that it is always destined to be translated into the terms of another story: the story of the belly and the members becomes the story of the general and the soldiers and the story of the rape of the hyena becomes the story of a political coup in much the same way that, in the *Esopo toscano*, the story of the axe and the woods becomes a story (in spiritual terms) of the body and soul, or (in secular terms) the story of two gamblers. The Aesopic fable is always a story pointing towards a different story, which is precisely what makes it amenable to the extravagance of full-blown Christian allegories, and to the regular interpretation of the story in both religious and secular terms, as we find in the *Esopo toscano*.

## **Part Two. Fools and Foolishness, Justice and Injustice**

So far we have seen that the *Esopo toscano* represents a stylistic elaboration of the traditional components of the Aesopic fable. On the one hand, the *Esopo toscano* takes the traditional plot of the fable and expands the role of the characters, giving them voices, giving them personalities, and making a more "story-ful" version of the story. On the other hand, the *Esopo toscano* takes the traditional epimythium of the fable, and expands the interpretive process according to the rules of Christian allegory, analyzing the items of the story one by one in order to detect their symbolic meanings (both spiritual and secular). Especially in this application of Christian allegorical exegesis, the fables of the *Esopo toscano* closely resemble the fables of Odo of Cheriton.<sup>52</sup> Given

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<sup>52</sup> Even Odo occasionally amuses himself with the characters of the fables in a way that is reminiscent of the *Esopo toscano*, especially in his appropriation of the beast epic heroes Reynard and Isengrimus. For a discussion of Odo's fables, see Chapter 4.



these fundamental similarities between Odo and the *Esopo toscano*, it is not surprising that, again like Odo, the *Esopo toscano* has trouble accommodating the traditional Aesopic plot in which the fool must be punished for his mistake. As we have seen already, the author of the *Esopo toscano* is sometimes willing to criticize the fools, the *semplici*, for the foolish mistakes that they make. For example, the stag who admires his horns and scorns his legs is a simple man, *semplice uomo*, "who abandons profitable and welcome work that is useful in favor of empty and fruitless pleasure." Yet at the same time, the trees, who foolishly give a handle to the axe, are not criticized for their action: they give the bit of wood to the axe because they respond to the axe's prayers in good faith (*di buona fede*). Just like Odo, the *Esopo toscano* is sensitive to the demands of Christian charity: even if it may be Aesopically foolish to act in faith and trust, this is sometimes the behavior required of a good-hearted Christian.

### *Uomini di buona fede e umili*

For a clear example of this tension between Aesopic self-preservation and the demands of Christian charity, we can turn to the familiar story of the wolf with the bone in this throat, who is assisted by a long-beaked bird (stork or crane). In Phaedrus's version of the story, the bird was the "M" character in the story; in fact, the bird was a double-"M" character, committing two acts of foolishness (*bis peccat*): first, she gave assistance to an altogether wicked character and, second, she expected a reward for her services.<sup>53</sup> In Odo's Christian interpretation of the fable, however, there was no

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<sup>53</sup> Phaedrus 1.08 = Perry 156.

condemnation of the bird for her charitable willingness to assist the wolf in distress. Instead, the focus of the story was on the wickedness of the wolf, and his cruelty in refusing to pay the bird for her services:<sup>54</sup>

Sic rustici et pauperes, quando serviunt, nullam mercedem habere possunt. Dicit enim dominus: Homo meus es; nonne magnum est, si te non excorio, si te vivere permitto.

So too with farmers and the poor who are unable to claim their pay for the services they perform. For their lord says: You are my man; isn't it a great thing if I don't flay you alive, if I let you live?

Given Walter's derivation from Phaedrus via the Romulus tradition, it is not surprising that he follows Phaedrus's emphasis on the mistake made by the crane. Although Walter does not criticize the crane as being mistaken (*bis peccat*), it is clear that the crane is the didactic focal point of the story: from observing the story of the crane, we should learn not to make the same mistake that the crane made, and which almost cost her her life. The epimythium of the story in Walter's version of the story thus conveys what is a decidedly uncharitable, and therefore un-Christian message: you should only do good unto other do-gooders, and not to your enemies, *nil prodest prodesse malis*.<sup>55</sup>

Arta lupum cruciat via gutturis osse retento;  
Mendicat medicam, multa daturus, opem.  
Grus promissa petit de faucibus osse revulso;  
Cui lupus: an vivis munere tuta meo?  
Nonne tuum potui morsu precipere collum?  
Ergo tibi munus sit tua vita meum.  
Nil prodest prodesse malis: mens prava malorum  
Immemor accepti non timet esse boni.

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<sup>54</sup> Odo 6 = Perry 156, cited on p. 229.

<sup>55</sup> Walter 8 = Perry 156 (for Phaedrus's version, see p. 23)..

A bone had gotten stuck and the wolf was tormented by his constricted throat. He scrounges for a doctor's help, promising a large reward. The crane asks for the promised reward after having removed the bone from the wolf's throat. The wolf replies: "Haven't I already paid you by letting you live? couldn't I have bitten your head off? Therefore your life is the reward I offer you." It does no good to do good to evil-doers [*nil prodest prodesse malis*]; the crooked minds of wicked men are quick to forget favors rendered.

While the crane is not explicitly called a "fool," it is clear that the message of the fable is not to do what the crane has done: that is, we should not risk our lives by doing business with evil-minded men, even in a case where the evil-minded man finds himself in a desperate and seemingly helpless situation.

The *Esopo toscano* also emphasizes the crane's trusting nature; it is in an act of guileless trust, *semplicemente*, that the bird lowers her head into the jaws of the wolf:<sup>36</sup>

***Concerning the crane who extracted a bone from the throat of the wolf.*** While eating a piece of meat which had a bone in it, the wolf swallowed the bone and it got stuck in his throat. Seeing that he was in mortal danger, the wolf sent all around the region promising a lot of money to anybody who could free him from this disability, and the crane, who wanted to earn the wolf's money and win his gratitude, in complete trust [*semplicemente*] put his neck and beak into the throat of the wolf and extracted the bone so that the wolf was cured and free of his ailment. The crane asked the wolf to pay the price of his services, and the wolf responded as follows: "You should know that you are alive thanks to God and to me, given that it would have been an easy thing for me to bite your head off when you placed your neck between my teeth. Since you are still alive, you have already been paid for your services; I have granted you your life, let that be reward enough for you."

This characterization of the crane as a trusting and simple soul is developed even further in the moralization of the story. The author of the *Esopo toscano* picks up on the element of ingratitude in Walter's epimythium, and then goes on to criticize the wolf at

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<sup>36</sup> *Esopo toscano* 8 = Perry 156 (Italian text cited at p. 288).

length for this reprehensible moral failure.<sup>57</sup>

The author says in this fable that doing favors for wicked men leads to nothing good because their deplorable attitude does not hesitate to forget the good services done to them. In spiritual terms, the wolf is a symbol of the person who is ungrateful for the gifts of God, thinking that he himself is worthy because of his own works to rule over lesser persons [*de' minori*], while only showing reverence in moments of desperation; meanwhile the efforts of his subordinates are scorned, and he considers it a great favor if he so much as smiles at them. The crane is a symbol of trusting and humble men [*uomini di buona fede e umili*]. In secular terms, the wolf is a symbol of the tyrants [*per questo lupo s'intende gli tiranni*] who chew and swallow the efforts of the little people [*de' piccoli*], and want for them to satisfy him with their labors and possessions, simply in order that he not attack them, and the crane is a symbol of these little people [*i piccoli*].

By the time the author of the *Esopo toscano* has completed his interpretation of the story, the Aesopic foolishness of the crane has been turned into a case of victimization. The crane acts *semplicemente*, trustingly, but perhaps also with a touch of foolishness; this behavior is then glossed as being spiritually well-intentioned, *di buona fede*. In addition, the interpretation emphasizes the crane's humble status as one of the *umili*; she is one of the *piccoli*, the little people, oppressed by the will of their tyrannical superiors.<sup>58</sup> It is not even so much a struggle between good and evil, but between the lesser (the *umili*, the *piccoli*) and the greater. This vocabulary of the oppressed little people, the *umili*, the *piccoli*, is not part of the original Aesopic vocabulary: the victim in the traditional

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<sup>57</sup> *Esopo toscano* 8 = Perry 156 (Italian text cited at p. 288).

<sup>58</sup> *Umile* is found through the fables of the *Esopo toscano* and is regularly a term of praise (which is certainly not the case in traditional Aesopic rhetoric); again, we are dealing with a Christian transformation of the traditional Aesopic fable. Yet the word "humiliate" is also still found in a negative sense, as in the story of the city mouse and the country mouse, *Esopo toscano* 12 (= Perry 352), where the city mouse begins by making fun of the country mouse for not being able to enjoy life in the city: *umiliavalo*.

Aesopic fable is a fool, and deserves the fate that befalls him (*merito plectimur*).<sup>59</sup> Yet we saw this new framework of values being imposed already in Phaedrus, where the victim was no longer seen as the victim of his own mistake but rather as the victim of injustice, an innocent little creature suffering at the hands of wicked and more powerful creatures. This same framework pervades the interpretations of the stories in the *Esopo toscano* as well, where the *piccoli* are regularly the victims of the tyrants, the *tyranni*, whose wickedness is everywhere evident.<sup>60</sup>

### *O rubatore animale d'iniquità*

This theme of the innocent victim was already strongly marked in Phaedrus's version of the wolf and the lamb at the stream,<sup>61</sup> so we should not be surprised to find it again in Walter's version of the story, in which the lamb is labeled as *innocuus* (comparable to the use of *innocens* in Phaedrus's version of the story):<sup>62</sup>

Est lupus, est agnus: sitit hic, sitit ille, fluentum  
 Limite non uno querit uterque siti.  
 In summo bibit amne lupus, bibit agnus in imo.

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<sup>59</sup> The phrase *merito plectimur* is from Phaedrus's version of the birds who elected the kite to be their king, 1.31 = Perry 486, cited on p. 26.

<sup>60</sup> This positive emphasis on the *piccolo* or the *minore* is found in the story of the small and trusting mouse and the kite in *Esopo toscano* 3 (= Perry 384). The story of the city mouse and the country mouse, *Esopo toscano* 12 (= Perry 352) becomes a story of the superiority of the "small things" of the countryside to the grandeur of the city. The long-suffering donkey in *Esopo toscano* 43 (= Perry 565), who finally sees the horse who insulted him reduced to ruin, exemplifies the humble and patient virtues of the *piccoli*.

<sup>61</sup> Phaedrus 1.1 = Perry 155, cited on p. 166, 229.

<sup>62</sup> Walter 2 = Perry 155 (for Phaedrus's version, see p. 166, 229).

Hunc timor impugnat verba movente lupo:  
 "Rupisti potumque mihi rivoque decorem."  
 Agnus utrumque negat se ratione tuens:  
 "Nec tibi nec rivo nocui: nam prona supinum  
 Nescit iter nec adhuc unda nitore caret."  
 Sic iterum tonat ore lupo: "Mihi damna minaris?"  
 "Non minor," agnus ait. Cui lupo: "Immo facis;  
 Fecit idem tuus ante pater sex mensibus actis:  
 Cum bene patris, crimine patris obi."  
 Agnus ad hec: "Tanto non vixi tempore." Predo  
 Sic tonat: "An loqueris, furcifer?" huncque vorat.  
Sic nocet innocuo nocuus, causamque nocendi  
Invenit. Hi regnant qualibet urbe lupi.

There is a wolf, and there is a lamb: both one and the other are thirsty, and each of them seeks to quench their thirst in a stream standing at different positions: the wolf is drinking upstream, and the lamb is downstream from the wolf. Fear seizes the lamb when the wolf begins speaking to him: "You have stirred up my drinking water and ruined the calm of the stream." The lamb denies both accusations, protecting himself with logic: "I did no harm to you or to the stream: for the waterway cannot go from low to high, and the water's flow down here lacks none of its sparkle." Thus once again the wolf thunders at the lamb: "Are you making threats against me?" "I make no threats," the lamb says. The wolf replies: "But you do indeed; and your father did the same thing to me six months ago: since you follow in your father's footsteps, die for your father's crime!" The lamb says to that: "I wasn't even born at that time." The wolf thunders at his prey again: "Still talking, you ruffian?" and he eats him. So the harmful one does harm to the harmless, and finds some cause for harm. In every sort of city there reign these wolves.

In this case, Walter's abstract and artificial poetic vocabulary actually serves to heighten the absurdity of the encounter between the wolf and the lamb. When the wolf makes his first verbal assault on the lamb, he does so relying on the appropriately poetic style of assonance in *rupisti* and *rivoque*: *rupisti potumque mihi rivoque decorem*, "you have stirred up my drinking water and ruined the calm of the stream." The third accusation also has a whiff of poetic assonance about it -- *mihi damna minaris?*, "are you making threats against me?" -- and the third accusation elegantly fills the two hemistichs of a

couplet's second line: *cum bene patrisses, crimine parris obi*, "since you follow in your father's footsteps, die for your father's crime!" The lamb replies with his own poetic assonance: *tanto non vixi tempore*, "I wasn't even born at that time." By this time the wolf's poetical patience has come to an end, and he bursts out with an unrefined and unpoetic "*an loqueris, furcifer?*", "still talking, you ruffian?" He then eats the lamb, *huncque vorat*. The struggle is not only between the endless resources of the lamb's logic, but also the wolf's short supply of poetic ripostes; eventually the wolf runs out of poetry, and gets down to business, which is to say he eats the lamb.

In the version of this story in the *Esopo toscano*, however, the language of the exchange between the wolf and the lamb is far less restrained, and quickly reaches a crescendo of graphic violence in which the wolf accuses the lamb of plotting the wolf's death and wanting to drink the blood of his children:<sup>63</sup>

***Concerning the wolf and the lamb drinking at the river.*** Having been busy doing their business in various places, it happened that the wolf and the lamb each grew very thirsty and came looking for something to drink in the same location. And the wolf was drinking upstream from the lamb, and the lamb unluckily came to drink at the same river, but downstream from the wolf. The wolf then started a conversation with the lamb as follows: "It is no small act of daring, and you have armed yourself with no little pride, if you come here to ruin my drinking and to make a disorderly mess of the beautiful water of this river." And the lamb was scared when he saw the wolf and he was afraid of the wolf's fierce way of talking, but he denied that he had ruined the wolf's drinking and swore that he had not disturbed the beauty of the river, speaking humbly [*umilmente*]: "My lord, you know better than I do that the water does not flow uphill, and that the flow of the stream retains all its beauty, and that by drinking as I am I have not wronged you or the river." When the wolf saw that the lamb was able to justifiably excuse himself in such respectful words, he pretended that the lamb's humble words [*con umili parole*] had been spoken out of arrogance and in a terrible voice he shouted: "Isn't it enough that you have insulted me, but on top

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<sup>63</sup> *Esopo toscano* 2 = Perry 155 (Italian text cited at p. 289).

of that you threaten to bring about my own death and to drink the blood of my offspring [*d'essere cagione della mia morte e di bere del sangue de' miei figliuoli*]?" The lamb, with as much humility as he could muster [*quella umiltà che poteva*], excused himself as follows: "God forbid that my heart would think of such a treacherous crime, or that my tongue would ever say such fatal words." The wolf then answered him: Aha, so much the worse for you! I know what you are thinking and what you are saying and what you would do to me, if you were able. But that's no surprise, after all, since it's not yet six months ago that your father did the same thing. And because you are so much like your father, you will die for his sins." And when the lamb saw that he was going to lose his life in any case, he answered the wolf with these boastful and vain words [*con superbe e vane parole*], saying: "O you thieving animal of iniquity, I am not old enough to have to suffer such punishment." To which the wolf responded: "Both your actions and the sound of your words reveal the plotting of your wicked mind." And he grabbed the lamb by the throat and strangled him.

Even more striking than the unconstrained violence of the wolf's words is the unexpected outburst by the lamb, who puts aside his pretense of speaking humbly to the wolf, and finally speaks his mind: *O rubatore animale d'iniquità* the lamb finally says to the wolf, "O you thieving animal of iniquity." This outburst follows the lamb's earlier circumspect replies, in which he had addressed the wolf humbly (*umilmente*) as "sir" (*signor*) until he finally lost his self-control. As usual, the author of the *Esopo toscano* shows a real interest in the psychology of his characters, and explains something of their motivations and inner emotions. The lamb is explicitly said to be afraid of the wolf when he makes his first humble response; in his second response, the lamb struggles to keep his answer as humble as possible (*l'agnello con quella umiltà che poteva*). By the third response, the lamb realizes that he is doomed, and no longer restrains himself: "he answered the wolf with these boastful and vain words," *con superbe e vane parole*. The lamb's final riposte to the wolf offers a kind of psychological satisfaction that is unprecedented in the Aesopic tradition. Even Phaedrus, who made the lamb into the wolf's innocent victim,



did not use the verbal resources offered by the dialogue form to let the lamb register this protest against the wolf's iniquity. Phaedrus protested on the lamb's behalf, but did not let the lamb give voice to his own complaint.

Yet despite the lamb's verbal heroism in this version of the story, there is no mention of the lamb's defiance in the moral. For the author of the *Esopo toscano*, the point is not, after all, to make the lamb into the positive hero of the story, but rather to vituperate the wicked wolf. The lamb is merely the victim, another example of the little monks, *i piccoli fratelli*, or the lesser citizen, the *minore*, who is preyed upon by his tyrannical superiors:<sup>64</sup>

Wolves like these reign in every city.<sup>65</sup> In terms of God, this wolf symbolizes the monk who looks like an honest and holy man but who treats his lesser brethren [*i suoi piccoli fratelli*] unfairly, not hesitating to disturb and denigrate them with his words and deeds. In secular terms, this wolf is a symbol of every tyrant who because of his powerful family and because of his wealth is able to harass a lesser person [*il minore*] with false accusations, and without giving any heed to the honorable thing to do he does not hesitate to disgrace or destroy the glorious reputation of people who do what is right.

As already in Phaedrus, this kind of moral falls into the category of the satirical rather than the didactic. What, after all, is the point of such a moral? If you are a lamb, one of the *piccoli fratelli*, this moral does not tell you what to do when you must confront one of these ravening wolves. If you are a wolf, the moral might be trying to shame you into good behavior, but there is no sign that the wolf is ashamed or humiliated in the

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<sup>64</sup> *Esopo toscano* 2 = Perry 155 (Italian text cited at p. 289).

<sup>65</sup> Here the *Esopo toscano* is paraphrasing Walter, but without the usual introductory phrase -- *Dice l'autore* -- which marks usually very precise translations of Walter's epimythium.

preceding story: the wolf lives up to all his wolfishness in both words and deeds over the course of the story. The closest that the wolf comes to a public humiliation is when the lamb defiantly calls the wolf by his true name: *O rubatore animale d'iniquità*. Yet even this effort on the lamb's part is marked by futility, by vanity; the *superbe e vane parole* of the lamb are a new addition to the fable, but do not change the direction or force of the moral.

### *Opere di vendetta*

The traditional Aesopic repertoire does, of course, offer an appropriately Aesopic response to victimization: these are the fables of revenge, such as the story of the fox and the stork inviting one another to dinner. Walter's version of the stork's revenge remains very close to the version told by Phaedrus which we saw earlier. As usual, Walter's poem is marked by elaborate wordplay, including a perfectly balanced assonance following the names of the characters in the poem's opening line, *vulpe vocante...ciconia cenam*.<sup>66</sup>

Vulpe vocante, venit speratque ciconia cenam;  
Fallit avem liquidus, vulpe iocante, cibus.  
Cum bibat ista cibos, solum bibit illa dolorem:  
Hic dolor in vulpem fabricat arma doli.  
Sunt pauci mora pauca dies; avis inquit: "Habemus  
Fercula que sapiunt: dulcis amica, veni."  
Hec venit; hec vase vitreo bona fercula condit,  
At solam recipit formula vasis avem.  
Laudat opes oculo vasis nitor; has negat ori  
Formula: sic geminat visus odorque famem.  
Sic vulpes ieiuna redit, sic fallitur audens

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<sup>66</sup> Walter 33 = Perry 426 (for Phaedrus's version, see p. 35).

Fallere, sic telo leditur ipsa suo.  
Quod tibi non faceres alii fecisse caveto.  
Vulnera ne facias que potes ipse pati.

The fox makes an invitation: the stork hopes for a good dinner [*vulpe vocante, venit speratque ciconia cenam*] but the fox is playing a trick on her, and the liquid dinner deceives the stork. While the fox imbibes the meal, the bird can imbibe only sorrow: this sorrow arms the bird to play a trick on the fox. After a few days' delay, the bird says to the fox: "Let us enjoy a tasty meal together; please come, my dear friend." The fox comes, and the bird offers a wonderful meal in a glass jar, and the shape of the vase is suited only to the beak of the bird. The gleaming vase shows clearly the food it contains; the shape of it denies the food to the fox's mouth: thus both the aroma and sight of the food add to her hunger. So the fox went home hungry, the trickster tricked, trapped in her own web. Take care not to do to another what you do not want for yourself, so that you won't inflict wounds which you might suffer in turn yourself.

The Christian admonition to "do unto others as you would done unto you" is expressed here in its negative converse, as we would expect from an Aesopic fable with its strong orientation towards negative exempla: do *not* do to another person what you would *not* want done to yourself. This is not a fable of forgiveness and turning the other cheek, but of vendetta and revenge. Needless to say, this psychological and emotional intensity does not go unnoticed by the author of the *Esopo toscano* in his wonderfully detailed expansion of the story:<sup>67</sup>

**Concerning the fox and the stork.** The rascally fox wanted to humiliate [*schernire*] the stork, so she invited her to dinner, and the stork accepted the invitation in good faith [*di buona fede*], thinking that it was an act of friendship on the fox's part. And when the stork came to have dinner at the fox's house, she found that dinner consisted of a dark broth, liquid and flowing, which was served on a wide platter. Because of the shape of her beak, the stork was unable to taste the broth, but the wicked fox drank it all up with her wide tongue. When the stork had been so cruelly tricked [*malamente schernita*], and had gone home on an empty stomach, she was moved by such wickedness and ridicule [*tanta malizia e schernimento*] to conceive in her soul an act of revenge. The stork

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<sup>67</sup> *Esopo toscano* 33 = Perry 426 (Italian text cited at p. 289).

said to God: "May my soul not rest if such a disgrace and embarrassment is left to my sons to avenge; if it's the last thing I do, let me exact my own revenge." And the stork went to work immediately, and set off for the glass-maker, where she had a large jar made with a long and narrow neck, and she then filled the jar with food that both looked good and smelled good; and the neck of that jar was so narrow that only the stork could get her head and neck down inside it, and it was so long, that the fox would never be able to get his mouth or his jaw inside. Thus the fox would not be able to get any of the food unless he broke the jar. Having gotten everything ready, the stork invited the fox to dine with her, and she put the table outside, so that the food would be even more resplendent and pleasing to the eye in the light of the sun, and so that the heat of the sun would heighten the aroma of the food. She then went to the fox and said: "Sweet lady fox, there is something sweet to eat that I have at home, and which I would not dare to eat alone; I would rather die than commit such an act of gluttony. But since there is such a great friendship between us, I have come to ask you, and only you, to join me in this great delight and in the fine meal I've prepared." And when they reached the stork's house and washed their hands and sat down at the table, the stork had the jar brought in and asked the fox to please eat, and to try this wonderful food, so elegantly prepared. And the fox tried the jar from all sides, and even though she was very eager she could not see any way to get at the food. And the beauty of the jar and the wonderful aroma redoubled her hunger, and the stork with her long neck and her wise beak ate up every bite of the food. And thus the fox went back to her house hungry and ridiculed [*schernita*], and the stork was happy with her revenge [*allegra e vendicata*].

This fable provides another excellent example of the *Esopo toscano*'s emphasis on character development. The stork's monologue is expressed as a desperate prayer to God that she be able to avenge the humiliation she has suffered at the hands of the wolf; if she is unable to carry out her vendetta, it will fall to her sons to defend the reputation of their family! In the same way that the wolf was unexpectedly supplied with children in the story of the wolf and the lamb (when the wolf accused the lamb of wanting to slaughter his children and drink their blood), here the stork has been unexpectedly supplied with children so that she is humiliated not only in her own person, but in the person of her family. These kinds of details are not necessary to the plot of the story, but in order to emphasize the shameful *schernimento* which the fox has managed to inflict on the stork.

In addition to these psychological details, the author of the *Esopo toscano* also fills this version of the story with physical details, pure inventions of his fantasy which revel in the unreal world of the fable: the stork goes to the glass-maker in order to have this jar specially designed; she decides to serve dinner outside so that the heat and light of the sun will heighten the presentation of the food in the jar; and before they sit down to dinner, both the fox and the stork wash their hands, even though neither of them is going to use their hands as they eat! Once again, these details do not further the plot in any particular way. Phaedrus did not need to explain how and where the stork got the jar which she used to trick the fox; the *Esopo toscano*'s reference to the *bicchieraio*, the glass-maker, does not do anything to advance the plot. The author of the *Esopo toscano* simply enjoys pushing this anthropomorphosis of the animals to unprecedented degrees: the animals have families, they have houses, and they wash their hands before having dinner. The more the author makes the animals look like us, the more he insists on the fiction of his story, and on its comic effects.

Yet as we have seen before, there is no room for comic effects in the Christian moralization of these stories. Thus, while the author of the *Esopo toscano* develops the stork's revenge in amusing detail, so that at the end of the story the fox is thoroughly humiliated and the stork is happy with her revenge (*allegra e vendicata*), the moral of the story takes on an entirely different tone. It still seems to be a good thing that the fox has been punished but the stork's rejoicing in her enemy's defeat cannot easily claim a place in this pious Christian frame of reference:<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> *Esopo toscano* 33 = Perry 426 (Italian text cited at p. 289).

The author shows in this story that no one should do to another person, what he would not want done to himself, and he should not inflict wounds on people which he himself might suffer. In spiritual terms, the fox is a symbol of the monks who because of their pride in their wisdom and their wicked intelligence [*sagacità e di malizioso sapere*] are able to trick the simple and faithful brethren [*i semplici e di buona fede*], and lead them to make efforts to take revenge on the tricksters with an equal malice, so that they don't have time left for prayer and for contemplating Christ [*e così loro fanno perdere il tempo dell' orazioni e del contemplare in Cristo*], and in this way the simple and the wise are tricked by the devil [*sono i semplici e savi dal diavolo scherniti*]. And the sweetness of the food of the fox and the stork is a symbol of the wind of vainglory. And the stork is a symbol of those who are tricked [*que' tali scherniti*] by the devil. In secular terms, the fox is a symbol of every traitor who begins by being disloyal and unfaithful, and then begins the habit of deceitful tricks, with which he is tricked and deceived [*schernito ed ingannato*], and the stork is a symbol of those who are induced by great deceptions and serious injuries to seek their revenge.

Even when we are dealing with a story of justified revenge, the author continues to put a strong emphasis on the stork's victimization: indeed, the stork has fallen victim to the devil, who is able to trick both simple and wise folk alike, *sono i semplici e savi dal diavolo scherniti*. But does the stork belong to the category of the simple or the wise? Clearly, the stork belongs to the category of the simple and faithful folk, *i semplici e di buona fede*, as opposed to those tricksters, like the fox, who are endowed with *sagacità e malizioso sapere*. This is the same preference for simplicity over wisdom which we saw already in Odo of Cheriton's fables, and which is an essential element of Christian culture and rhetoric.<sup>69</sup> It is not in the stork's nature to be a trickster (despite her wise beak, *becco savio*); instead, she is driven to this act of desperation by the fox's evil deeds. There is no place in the moral here for the sheer pleasure which the stork took in her revenge (the care with which she prepared the meal, the deliciously hypocritical

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<sup>69</sup> For a discussion of Odo's fables, see Chapter 4.

invitation that she extends to the fox); the vindictive prayer which the stork makes to God certainly has no place in this ethical moralization. Indeed, the author expects us to believe that the stork would otherwise be spending her time in pious contemplation of the Lord, if these wicked agents of the devil would only stop distracting her from her spiritual duties: *e così loro fanno perdere il tempo dell' orazioni e del contemplare in Cristo*. Unlike the traditional rhetoric of the Aesopic fable, Christian rhetoric demands that the wicked derision of the *schernimento*, must be consigned to the sphere of the devil. An ideal Aesopic world, on the other hand, would be filled with endless wit and insult, in which one *schernimento* gives rise to another *schernimento*, back and forth in an endless exchange of insult and injury (which is also the plot line pursued by the beast epic tradition, in the endless battles between Reynard and Isengrimus). In the Christian version of this world, the *schernimento* is at best a necessary evil; the stork is driven to this vicious act by the devil's relentless wickedness, but it might even have been better for her to suffer her injuries in the patience and humility which is the mark of the *piccolo uomo di buona fede*. Aesop's vicious and vindictive humor becomes unacceptable where the law of charity rules and the mechanisms of divine punishment are no laughing matter. At the same time, the author of the *Esopo toscano* revels in the comic potential offered by these fables: as he narrates the insults and counter-insults of the fox and the stork inviting one another to dinner, he is exploiting the comic potential inherent in the Aesopic fable tradition, with all its vicious wit and mockery. Yet when it comes to the moralization of the story, the author of the *Esopo toscano*, just like Odo, is reluctant to let the plot speak for itself. Instead, he substitutes a Christian allegory in place of the

traditional endomorphism, the original "moral inside the story" which combined invective and instruction, representing a vicious kind of didacticism which was the Aesopic fable's original *raison d'être*. As we can see in both Odo and the *Esopo toscano*, Aesopic fables flourished in the Middle Ages, but they did so in a distinctly medieval fashion, carrying on the ancient comic tradition but within the strict constraints imposed by Christian culture.



***Della battaglia delle bestie cogli uccelli.***<sup>1</sup> Avendo mandato il liono la lepre per suo grande bisogno con lettere, trovossi col falcone, ed hagli tolto le lettere, e portolle dinanzi all'aquila, e in queste lettere si conteneva cose di grande vergogna dell'aquila; cioè ch'era trovata in avolterio col nibbio. E vedendo l'aquila che il liono cercava sua vergogna, mandò al liono imbasceria, dicendo che lo voleva per nemico, e che mai non porterebbe corona, se no 'l facesse conoscente di tanta follia. Ed udito il liono la sconvenevole imbasciata dell'aquila, rispose gabbando: Io ho intendimento di tenere consiglio e parlamento di questo mese, ed assembrare tutta la mia gente in Maremma nel piano di Boccheggiano, e se l'aquila ha intendimento di vendicare sua ingiuria, ivi mi potrà trovare. Ed acciocchè a questo dia fede, voglio che gli portiate questa lancia e il guanto. Ora è stabilito la battaglia tra gli uccelli e le bestie, ed ogni parte s'apparecchia, e fornisce di tutti i fondamenti da battaglia; e sono giunti in sul campo. E vedendo il pipistrello essere fatte le schiere ed essere più le bestie che gli uccelli, prese una lancia lunga, ed enne andato dalla parte delle bestie, ed accostossi colla masnada de' topi; ed allora l'aquila, siccome savia e provveduta ammaestra le schiere, e così fa il liono; ed ordinato gli scorridori cominciassi la battaglia, e durò grande parte del dì; nella quale battaglia gli uccelli hanno vinto e messe le bestie in sconfitta. E vedendo il pipistrello avere gli uccelli vittoria, tornossi tra gli uccelli, e stava quasi mezzo svergognato. Allora l'aquila lo fece pigliare ed impiccare per li piedi, e tutto quanto lo fece percussare. E quando fu spiccato, in presenza di tutti gli altri uccelli fecegli questo comandamento (e questo si è scritto per le mani del nibbio): che mai di dì non si lasci trovare in luogo d'onore; e fu tormentato con grandissimi bastoni, e tutto fu fracassato.

Dice l'autore, che non è giammai buon cittadino colui che pone innanzi il nimico a' cittadini, e che niuno può servire utilmente a due signori. Spiritualmente per l'aquila dobbiamo intendere l'anima, la quale attende all'alte cose del cielo: e per lo liono possiamo intendere il corpo, il quale è fatto della vile materia della terra: e per questo battaglia possiamo intendere la contestazione, ch'è tra l'anima ed il corpo: e per lo pipistrello l'appetito che s'apprende all'apparenza delle cose temporali, e poi si pente, veduto il mal fine. E temporalmente per le bestie ed uccelli possiamo intendere Guelfi e Ghibellini. E per lo pipistrello cotali che tengono di mezzo, i quali dicono e gridano: Viva chi vince, e non bene conosciuti sono sospetti a ciascuna parte.

***Del corbo, volpe e cacio.***<sup>2</sup> Avendo trovato il corbo un cacio, andonne con esso in un alto albero, e tenendolo in becco prendevane grande diletto; ed intanto sopravvenne la volpe per sua buona ventura, e levò gli occhi al corbo e stimò per sua arte di privarlo di

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<sup>1</sup> *Esopo toscano* 44 = Perry 566.

<sup>2</sup> *Esopo toscano* 15 = Perry 124.

tanto bene. E ponendosi a piè dell'albero si volse in suso, e pose mente fiso quasi come vedesse una gran maraviglia, mosse in alta boce simiglianti parole: Vecchia sono in questo mondo ed ho cercato per diverse parti e di là da mare e di qua, e vedute diverse bestie ed uccelli, dotate ed ornate dalla natura d'infinite bellezze; ma sopra tutto mi pare l'uccello che mi è sopra capo. la cui bellezza m'affolta in questo luogo ed induce al mio animo grande allegrezza e diletto. E udendo il corbo lodarsi e di sè sì altamente parlare, incominciò a fare certi atti col capo e colla coda, per li quali atti la volpe comprese che l'aveva fedito colla saetta della vanagloria, ed al suo parlare aggiunse questo: Se 'l suono del canto fusse di tanta dolcezza alle mie orecchie quanto all'animo è il piacere della bellezza, non dimanderei altro cibo che d'udire il canto e vedere tale uccello, la cui bianchezza soprastra a quella del cigno ed ogni altra candidezza. E credendo il corbo pel suo canto piacere alla volpe, siccome piaceva a sè, cominciò a cantare, ed intanto il cacio gli cadde. Allora la volpe abbiendo il cacio, disse al corbo con grandi schernimenti: Sta cheto per l'amor d'Iddio che il tuo doloroso canto m'ha tolto il mio capo e priegoti ti parti, acciocchè mangiando io non vegga innanzi a me cotanta bruttura: che veramente il colore del tuo abito sarebbe piuttosto da essere Fornaio, o Carbonaio, o Appanator di Guado, o Maestro d'Inchiostro, ovvero Coiaio. E vedendosi il corbo ornare di sì sconvenevoli titoli e lodi, e privato per dolcezza di parole del suo cibo, partissi con un leggier battere d'ale svergognato, e la volpe con grande allegrezza mangiò il cacio.

Dice l'autore, che colui che si diletta della dolcezza della vanagloria, sostiene un amaro schernimento, e lo falso onore partorisce veraci fastidi. Spiritualmente s'intende per lo corbo quegli spirituali che si lasciano vincere dalle tentazioni della vanagloria e levansi in superbia; e come il corbo perdè il cacio, così perdono il frutto delle loro buone operazioni; e per la volpe lo infruttuoso vento della vanagloria. Temporalmente per lo corbo s'intende il semplice che per lusingamento di parole credendo più ad altrui di sè medesimo, che a sè medesimo, servono e donano per millanti a' millantatori, e ragionevolmente le dolci e ornate parole e lode sono prezzo a comprare i loro servigi e doni; e per la volpe ciascuno sottile lusingatore.

***Del lupo che trovò un capo d'un morto.***<sup>3</sup> Andando il lupo a diletto per un campo trovò un capo d'un uomo morto partito dallo imbusto, il quale cominciò a rivolgere con l'uno e con l'altro piede, e diceva simiglianti parole: A capo senza mente! e guancie senza voce! E meravigliasi fortemente ed arrescasi a memoria la poca stabilità del mondo.

Spiritualmente per questo lupo possiamo intendere il nimico della umana generazione il quale con diletto cerca di poterci fare cadere, e meravigliasi della nostra fragilità; ed allora ci mena e rivolge con l'uno e con l'altro piede, quando ci fa in diversi modi peccare; e per lo capo partito dal corpo lo sciagurato peccatore partito dal capo della santa chiesa e del suo principio Gesù Cristo per diversi modi di peccare. Temporalmente per lo lupo s'intende i mali uomini, che spendono il loro tempo in diletto

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<sup>3</sup> *Esopo toscano* 34 = Perry 27.

di male operazioni, e di ciò prendono grande allegrezza, quando in ciò alcuno possono indurre, e per lo capo partito dallo imbusto s'intende coloro ch'abbandonano le dritte e leali mercatanzie, e seguitano cattivi contratti ed opere di falsità.

***Del cerbio che si specchiava nella fonte.***<sup>4</sup> Andando il cerbio a diletto per la selva assalito da gran sete; e sì trovò una fonte con bell'acqua chiara; e bevendo di questa acqua, e specchiandosi in essa prendeva grande diletto dell'ombra, che rendevano le sue ramoso corna, e di grande bellezza molto si commendava. Ma guardandosi alle gambe, vedevale magre e secche; e di ciò aveva grande dolore, e portava nell'animo vergogna, e diceva: Innanzi non vorrei avere le gambe, che averle così sozze. ed intanto ecco i cacciatori, e co' bracchi ebbono levato il cerbio, ed esso va fuggendo per la selva, e passando tra alberi bassetti, le sue lunghe e ramoso corna furono attaccate; e così fu preso, e pregava le gambe che nel portassino via. Ma le lunghe corna negavano alle gambe il corrimento; e così quello, che stimava utile e dilettevole, fu cagione della sua morte; e quello che stimava sozzo e dannoso, era stato più volte cagione del suo campamento.

Dice l'autore per dispregiare quello che fa pro, ed amare quello che fa danno, enne sconsiglia cosa; perciocchè quello che noi fuggiamo, ci fa pro, e quello che noi amiamo, danno. Spiritualmente per lo cerbio possiamo intendere ciascuno uomo di questo mondo, il quale pone amore e diletto nelle delicatezze del mondo, le quali sono simiglianti alla corna del cerbio, e fugge l'asprezza delle penitenzie, la quale è simigliante alle gambe; e siccome le corna furono cagione della morte del cerbio adimpedirono il corrimento delle gambe, così le bellezze del corpo e delicato vivere impedisce le gambe della penitenza, non lasciandole avere il suo fine d'andare a vita eterna; e per la fonte e chiara acqua s'intende l'apparenza delle cose del mondo. Temporalmente s'intende per lo cerbio ogni semplice uomo, il quale abbandona il fruttuoso e grazioso utile, per lo vano diletto e senza frutto. E per le corna quello vano diletto; e per le gambe esso utile; e per la fonte ogni vanagloria.

***Della scura che non aveva manico, e del bosco.***<sup>5</sup> Non avendo la scura manico col quale potesse essere tenuta, non poteva nuocere. Ed essendo disarmata di tutte le sue potenzie, andò umilmente al bosco, e pregollo, che la dovesse provvedere d'alcuno piccolo bastoncino, il quale non facesse a lui danno; e che non gliel darebbe sì piccolo, e che a lei non fosse assai grazioso; perciocchè essendo senza manico, non era in prezzo dall'uomo e non la poteva adoperare al suo fine. E udendo il male provveduto bosco le preghiere della scura, e la grande utilità ed onore che la portava il manico, di buona fede non considerando i gravosi danni che di ciò li seguitavano, diede il manico. Ed essendo

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<sup>4</sup> *Esopo toscano* 47 = Perry 74.

<sup>5</sup> *Esopo toscano* 53 = Perry 303.

la scure armata del manico, cominciò a tagliare ed a combattere da ciascheduna parte del bosco. E sì veduto il bosco cominciò a dolersi in sè medesimo del suo piccolo provvedimento, dicendo: Io solo mi sono cagione di tanto pericolo e morte; e la mano diritta del villano mi uccide per lo mio dono.

Ammaestra l'autore in questa favola, che ciascuno si debba guardare d'armare il nimico suo di cosa, onde gli possa far danno; perciocchè colui che dà la cosa con la quale possa essere offeso, ragionevolmente perisce. Spiritualmente possiamo intendere per la scura i cinque sentimenti del corpo, i quali domati da discreta temperanza sono disarmati dalla potenza d'offendere all'anima, e seguitati ne' loro appetiti, cioè la gola ne' delicati mangiare ed abbondantemente, ed i piedi andando a luoghi disonesti, e le mani toccando le cose non lecite, la lingua parlando in vano, gli orecchi udendo con diletto le cose di poco frutto, e gli occhi vedendo e riguardando cose non dovute, con tutta la loro affezione levansi in superbia, e privano l'anima delle sue virtù, ed allora possiamo dire che si dia alla scure il manico, quando a' nostri appetiti disordinati pienamente coll'opere rispondiamo; e per lo bosco possiamo intendere essa anima. Temporalmente possiamo intendere per lo bosco e per la scura quelli due giuocatori, i quali abbiendo giucato l'uno all'altro ha vinto ogni cosa; e poi alle preghiere del perdente il vincitore gli presta danari, co' quali gli rinvince ciò che gli aveva guadagnato.

***Del gru che trasse l'osso dalla gola del lupo.***<sup>6</sup> Mangiando il lupo carne nella quale era osso, inghiottendola, l'osso gli s'attraversò nella gola, e vedendosi in pericolo di morte, mandò per lo paese promettendo molta moneta a colui che lo liberasse di tale infermità; ed il gru disideroso di guadagnare moneta e la grazia del lupo, messe semplicemente il collo e becco suo nella gola del lupo e trassene l'osso ed ebbe liberato e guarito. Dimandò il gru al lupo il prezzo del suo maesterio; rispose il lupo con simiglianti parole: Tu dei sapere che tu tieni per la vita per Dio e per me, perciocchè a me era assai leggieri, quando tu mettesti il tuo collo tra' miei denti, di mozzarloti: sicchè se tu se' vivo, già se' soddisfatto del tuo servizio; che tu hai la vita per me, basti che sia mio guigliardone.

Dice l'autore in questa favola che niente fa prode a servire a mali uomini; perciocchè la loro pessima mente non teme dimenticare i ricevuti benefici. Spiritualmente per questo lupo possiamo intendere ciascuna persona ingrata de' benefici d'Iddio, riputandosi degno, per suo bene operare, della signoria de' minori, e riverenzia facendo nei bisogni; e poi serviti, hanno in dispregio i loro servizi, stimandosi essere grande pagamento solamente mostrare la lieta faccia. Per lo gru s'intende uomini di buona fede e umili. Temporalmente per questo lupo s'intende gli tiranni li quali rodono e tranghiottiscono le fatiche de' piccoli e vogliono ch'eglino sieno contenti delle loro fatiche e derrate, solo che non gli offendano; e per lo gru intendesi i piccoli.

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<sup>6</sup> *Esopo toscano* 8 = Perry 156.

***Del lupo e dell'agnello che bevono al fiume.***<sup>7</sup> Avendo in diversi luoghi prese il lupo e l'agnello diverse fatiche, avvenne che ciascuno di loro aveva grande sete e dimandava il beveraggio per uno medesimo andamento. E bevendo il lupo dalla parte di sopra del fiume, venne l'agnello per sua mala ventura a bere nel medesimo fiume, ma dalla parte di sotto. Al quale il lupo mutò simiglianti parole: Non poco ardire ti muove, nè se' armato di piccola superbia, quando mi vieni a rompere lo mio beveraggio ed a guastare disordinatamente la bellezza di questo fiume. L'agnello spaventato per lo vedimento del lupo e per la paura del suo crudel parlare, negò che non dirompea il suo beveraggio nè non guastava la bellezza del fiume, dicendo umilmente: Signor mio so che meglio di me sapete che l'acqua non torna al monte, nè l'onda del fiume non ha manco di bellezza, sicchè in tale maniera bevendo non nocetti nè a voi nè al fiume. Vedendo il lupo che l'agnello ragionevolmente con umili parole si scusava, infinse le umili parole essere con arroganza proferte, e gridò con terribile boce dicendo: Non ti basta quello che m'hai offeso, ma minacci d'essere cagione della mia morte e di bere del sangue de' miei figliuoli? L'agnello con quella umiltà che poteva, si scusava dicendo: Non permetta Iddio che il mio cuore pensi tanta fellonia, nè che la mia lingua dica sì mortali parole. Al quale il lupo risponde: Ahi quanto cotesto è peggio! Io so quello pensi e parli e quello mi faresti, se tu avessi il potere. Ma di ciò non è maraviglia, ch'è quello che mi fece tuo padre non sono ancora compiuti sei mesi. E acciò che tu bene somigli tuo padre, voglio che tu muoia per li suoi peccati. Vedendo l'agnello che in ogni modo gli conveniva perdere la vita, risponde al lupo con superbe e vane parole dicendo: O rubatore animale d'iniquità, io non ho tanto tempo ch'io debbia patire simiglianti pene. Al quale il lupo risponde: E l'atto e il suono delle tue parole dimostra la intenzione della tua malvagia mente. E misegli mano in gola e strangolollo.

Simiglianti lupi regnano in ciascuna città. Secondo Iddio s'intende per questo lupo quello Religioso, il quale con apparenza di santità ed onesta vita tratta disordinatamente i suoi piccoli fratelli, non temendo di scandalizzargli avvilendogli con opere e con parole. Temporalmente per questo lupo è ciascheduno tiranno che per potenza di parentado e d'avere ruba, con falsi modi accagiona i minore, e non avendo rispetto che porti onore o di vergognarlo nè di perdere la fama gloriosa della ragionata gente.

***Della volpe e della cicogna.***<sup>8</sup> Volendo la volpe villanamente schernire la cicogna invitolla a cena, e ciò accettò la cicogna di buona fede credendo che procedesse da buona amistà. Ed andano a cenare a casa della volpe trovò apparecchiato da cena in su una large pietra uno liquido e corrente pevero nero, del quale non poteva per la tortezza del becco assaggiare: ma la malvagia volpe tutto colla sua large lingua il si beccava. Ed essendo la cicogna sì malamente schernita, che quasi digiuna tornava a casa sua, fue stretta da tanta malizia e schernimento, che pensava nell' animo opere di vendetta. Disse

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<sup>7</sup> *Esopo toscano* 2 = Perry 155.

<sup>8</sup> *Esopo toscano* 33 = Perry 426.

verso Iddio: Se mi dai vita solo una settimana, non avere misericordia dell' anima mia se tale onta e tanta vergogna rimane a vendicare a' miei figliuoli, e che io colla mia persona non la vendichi. E mossesi subitamente, ed andonne a uno bicchierajo, ed hassi fatto fare una guastada con grande corpo e lungo e stretto collo, ed halla piena d' uno odorifero e dilicato ammorsellato; ed era tanta la strettezza del collo della guastada, ch' appena la cicogna vi poteva metter il collo e il capo, e tanta la lunghezza, che la volpe non vi potesse giungere colla bocca o branca; sicchè del cibo per niuno modo la volpe potesse avere, se non guatarlo. Ed apparecchiato, la cicogna invitò la volpe a desinare e fece porre la mensa al sole, acciocchè tale mangiare per lo risplendimento fusse all' occhio più grazioso, per la caldo del sole rendesse maggiore odore, ed andò per la volpe e disse: Dolce amica, io ho a casa mangiari di grande dolcezza, i quali non ardirei di mangiare sola, e prima vorrei morire che io facessi tanta golosità; ma la grande amistà ch' è infra noi, richiede che voi sola siate compagna meco a tanta allegrezza ed a sì fatto mangiare. Ed essendo giunte a casa della cicogna e lavate le mani, posonsi al desco, e la cicogna fece venire la guastada, e così pregava la cicogna la volpe che gli piacesse di mangiare e prendere di sì dilicato e sì fatto cibo. E la volpe andava d' intorno alla guastada; e di ciò aveva grande volontà, ma non vedeva modo come di ciò potesse avere; e la bellezza del vasello e il grande odore gli raddoppiava la fame; e la cicogna col suo lungo collo e savio becco si mangiò tutto l' ammorellato. Ed in tal maniera la volpe tornò al suo albergo digiuna e schernita, e la cicogna rimase allegra e vendicata.

Ammaestra l' autore in questa favola che niuno debba fare ad altrui, se non quello che volesse ricevere a sè, nè dare quelle ferite che possono essere date a lui. Spiritualmente possiamo intendere per la volpe quegli spirituali, che per vanagloria di loro sagacità e di malizioso sapere gabbano i semplici e di buona fede, ed inducongli a pensare opere da potere contastare a gabbi di cotale malvagità, e così loro fanno perdere il tempo dell' orazioni e del contemplare in Cristo, ed in tal maniera sono i semplici e savi dal diavolo scherniti. E per la dolcezza del mangiare della volpe e della cicogna possiamo intendere il vento della vanagloria; e per la cicogna que' tali scherniti. Temporalmente s' intende per la volpe ciascuno ingannatore che principia di rompere lealtà e fede, e che induce i modi d' ingannare, coi quali esso medesimo è poi schernito ed ingannato; e per la cicogna coloro che sono indotti per grandi inganni e gravose ingiurie a vendicarsi.

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